

Something to Consider Hebrews 12:1-3 7/27/03

I bring you greetings from Gordon and Cora Newman and their four daughters. Joan and I were with in Honolulu ten day ago and we had a wonderful time of sharing with them what is going on here. It was Gordon's last day with Campus Crusade for Christ after fourteen years. He asked that you pray for him as they continue to seek God's next place of ministry.

I have something that I would like you to consider this morning. It is found in Hebrews 12:1-3. Lets read it together from our Bibles.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

How many of you have ever heard of the store Filene's basement. It is a famous store in Boston that you can get to directly from the subway station. It is famous for markdowns and clothing that has not passed quality inspection. My mother would always buy underwear for my two brothers' and me at Filene's basement. The problem was that you couldn't open the package to see where the flaw was. Now hold that thought and think about this. Think of Jr high boys gym class and locker rooms. Hold that thought and add one more. Because of the location of the parsonage think of the Northern Oaks area of the Twin Cities and what would happen to a seventh grade boy who when taking off his shirt displayed a t-shirt with the seam running down the middle of his chest. Got the picture. Not a pretty thought. Some of you are thinking that explains a lot of my behavior. Well our author in verse one tells us this. There is a heaven full of people surrounding the throne of God watching us run our race of faith. They are telling us to reject anything that inhibits our ability to live lives

pleasing to God. Rather than holding on to those things, attitudes and habits that slow us down we need to **identify the rejects** in our lives. And as we identify them we need to throw them away. The author identifies two. One is what hinders us. You see the picture on the bottom. It represents the best in aerodynamic design to minimize resistance. Lance Armstrong last week said that his newly designed clothing might have taken 70 seconds off his time. That was close to his margin of victory. I like to think of hindering as those things that inhibit spiritual growth and Christ like service. They may not even be bad or evil or displeasing to the Lord but they slow us down. Some of you here this morning are struggling with areas of your lives that if brought up to your brothers and sisters they would say, "What's the big deal". To them it may not be a big deal but knowing where you are right now and where you believe God is leading you puts you in a position of choice. Are you going to step away from what is OK to pursue what is even better? The other half is a thing that so easily entangle you. Can I meddle? For some of you it might be credit cards. The minimum monthly balance has you in a stranglehold of debt that keeps you from giving your tithes and using your money in ways that honor the Lord. But who wants to admit that they can't handle their finances and control their spending urges. For others it is the Internet. Pornography sites are only a click away and even a momentary glance is all it takes to make you feel dirty before God. Get rid of the Internet. I know it is far easier said than done. For others it might be the company you keep socially that like a powerful hand grabs you and takes you where you know you should not go before of addicted behaviors and substance abuse. The author says the presence of those who have gone ahead crying out it was worth losing even ones life for an eternity with Christ says identify the rejects and walk away.

The second thing the author teaches us is the importance of **running like you mean it.** Some of you know that I am a big Timber wolves fan. I grew up going to see the Celtics in Boston garden but since moving to Minnesota 11 years ago I have fallen in love with the Timber wolves. You know

there is nothing like going to a game and watching a halfhearted effort. You can see it in the sharpness of the passes, the intensity of driving the lane and the willingness to dive for the loose ball. In our spiritual lives the author is reminding his hearers back then and us today that being a Christ follower means living every day fully unto Jesus Christ. In Seattle Washington is the famous meat market. They have put together a motivational video entitled fish. One of their four key principles is showing up. What they mean is when you are at work be there physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually. To remember that you are at work to work and to be engaged with what you are doing. Earlier he had spoken about the importance of meeting regularly together but it is much more than checking into worship once each week. It is to each and every moment of our lives live in the presence of God, following the leading of the Holy Spirit and modeling the character and choosing the priorities of Jesus.

And that brings us to his last truth to consider. Chose where to look. Because he uses athletics as a reference let me do so again. Remember Abramson in Chariots of fire. Mr. Mitubischi told him to look only at the finish line. You have to **choose where to look**. What you focus on is what you are drawn to and what you become. The author tells us to focus on Jesus. To choose to look at him and to move our eyes away from anything else. Now some of you are saying Joel it doesn't work. But it does. As kids we were all familiar with this line from one of our parents. "Stop staring". Maybe it was a person with a special need or challenge. Perhaps it was someone who was in an embarrassing situation and you were taught to look away. And you learned after time to be able to do that. You learned to avert your eyes. I asked a friend who was raised in a very different culture that included eight brothers and sisters in a one-room home. He was the oldest. I asked him about his parents and their life as husband and wife with all the kids in the same bedroom. He gave me this really strange look and said, "You Americans are so weird. One of the things you learn very early as a child is to avert your eyes and focus on something different." This is what the author is telling us. Keep

looking at Jesus and focusing on him and that is why I want to suggest again something I recommended several years ago. Don't go long in your personal Bible study without a reading in one of the Gospels. To keep fresh in your minds eye the life of Jesus Christ. To observe how he dealt with what could hinder or entangle him and then mimic him.

I entitled the sermon something to consider. In reality I want you to do far more than consider. I want you to close your eyes and ask the Lord is there something in my life that now today you are saying it is time for me to stamp it as a reject and walk away. Or maybe you have been so to speak, just punching your clock spiritually and you need to reengage and lastly maybe it is that you have somehow misplaced the centrality of Jesus with something else. And you need to recalibrate your focus. Lets pray silently.