

“Being a Witness” Pt 2

Fixing Our Eyes Upon Jesus, Our High Priest

Hebrews 12:1-2

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Jeff: Our heavenly Father, we are thankful that You are such a merciful Creator and that You are good, and that we see that in Your creation as our brother Sig has mentioned. Father, we're thankful for the power displayed there. We're thankful for those qualities that we can see when we look at creation and marvel. We're thankful for that general revelation. And yet we are also thankful and even more so for the special revelation that You gave to us, Lord, because when Adam fell, general revelation was insufficient to save. And yet You brought alongside of it special revelation, that we might indeed know what salvation is in Jesus Christ. And so because of Christ the creation is all the more marvelous to us. So Father, we're thankful for Your revelation to us, general and special. We're thankful for the Lord Jesus Christ who opened our eyes to the marvel of it. And we're thankful for the opportunity to be here this morning. Father, You are good. And we ask now that You will, by Your Spirit, open our eyes to the brilliance of the Word and to the loveliness of Christ and to our great need for Him. Father, as we come, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: All right. Let's turn to Hebrews chapter 12 and let us look at verses 1 and 2. This is part 2 of what we did last time.

Now I'm going to say a couple words about it in just a minute. But I want to read these two verses to you so we can have our verses before us. Hebrews chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. This is God's word.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Now I'm going to—

Sig: You had it two weeks in a row. Come on, now! *(Laughter)*

Brave Man: The word of the Lord.

Jeff: I totally forgot. *(Laughter)* Such haste here! The word of the Lord.

Brave Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: Amen. All right. The outline that we're going to look at is the same outline that we looked at the last time. However I've made some modifications in it because I want us to actually go back for a minute, because what I think I did the last time is that I think I clouded the issue by talking about the difference in the English translation and what was behind it in the Greek. And I want to leave that behind today. I want to pare it down. I want to get back to the essential aspects that I spoke to you about the last time we were together. And I want to see if that drives it home a little clearer. Then I want us to move into some of the material that we didn't move into the last time we were together.

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So I want to look at the introduction. I want to look at some introductory points. And that’s where I essentially pair this down a bit and hopefully take away some of the confusion that was brought along by the Greek that undergirds the English and some of the differences in the English. Then I want to talk about *the great company* that we find here in this text. And then I want us to think about *becoming part of that great company*. And then I want us to finally look at Jesus, who is indeed the Leader.

And so let’s focus a minute on the introduction. And I said to you the last time that approval is a big and an important word here, not only in this text but in the one that comes before. But let’s think about what this means for just a minute.

When we think about approval we think about somebody speaking well of someone. And I made the point the last time with the frog from *The Wind and the Willows* that the frog sought the approval of his would-be father-in-law. And that’s what we do. We seek the approval of our would-be fathers-in-law, right? And we want them to speak well of us and speak a word of blessing to us as we enter into a relationship with their daughters. So we want their blessing and approval. We want them to speak well.

Now that’s what it means when we think about approval, somebody speaking well of us. And we seek approval because it’s desirable. And this is one of the points that I want to make to you. We ought to want someone’s approval. In one sense we want our wives’ approval. Children ought to want their parents’ approval, and so on. And so we want approval because it’s desirable.

Now why is this all relevant to what we’re talking about? Remember, some of this is just review. Why is this relevant to what we’re looking at today? Well, it’s relevant because Hebrews 11 is actually enclosed by the idea of approval. Those who have God’s approval are those we find in Hebrews chapter 11. And we see that in this way. I’m going to go back to that last slide in just a second. But we see that in this way.

It begins in 11:2 with “For it is by it,” that is, faith, that men gained approval. And then Hebrews 11:39. “And all these, having gained approval through their faith.”

Now one of the things that we need to understand is this. We need to understand that Hebrews 11 is about that great cloud of witnesses, but those who have gained the approval of God. God has spoken well of these people. That’s the important thing to notice. And why? Because what we are being told is this. We ought to aspire to the same thing. We ought to aspire to God’s approval.

Now how is it that we attain that approval? We attain that approval by what we saw in the text. We attain it by faith.

Now that raises a question, doesn’t it, a potential difficulty when we think about faith. Now I want you to think about this. I know I’ve talked to you about this at least to some degree in the past. And I want to talk about it again because I think it’s really important. And in part I’ll see if you can help me with some of it. I need to pause for just a second and see if I can remember how Sig is to be portrayed. *(Laughter)*

Transcriber’s Note: Jeff draws a portrait of Sig.

Sig: I have a beard now.

Jeff: Well I’ll add the beard. This is the hair, the ears and the beard.

Brave Man: His mouth is missing. *(Laughter)*

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Jeff: In this picture his mouth is going to be closed. *(Laughter)*

All right. Now when we think about Sig, we think about him in three parts, right? We think about Sig having a mind.

Transcriber’s Note: A disparaging look.

Jeff: Easy, easy! *(Laughter)* I’m telling you right now. We think about Sig. And look, we’ll put this in red.

Transcriber’s Note: Sig’s head.

Jeff: And Sig has a big heart. So we’ll call that his emotions. Or, if you remember that discussion we had a couple weeks ago, his affections. Remember, our affections are stirred up within us by the spirit. Emotions are affected from those things outside of us. So what we’re primarily thinking of here is affections, what is stirred up within us. But it could be and doesn’t exclude emotions, that which is stirred up from without. And then what are we going to add to this? What we’re going to add to this is the will, the capacity to choose.

Now let’s think about an unregenerate Sig, okay? An unregenerate Sig is someone who can think about Biblical truth and understand it. And what I mean by that is that he can understand the nouns and the verbs and the prepositional phrases that all go into making up a sentence and a paragraph. He can understand John 3:16 when it says, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only-Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”* It doesn’t take a regenerate person to understand the nouns and the verbs and the purpose and intent of that sentence, because we are told that even the demons understand Biblical truth.

Brave Man: Yes.

Jeff: Nor does it take a regenerate person to agree that that statement is true, if indeed there is a God and that God is sovereign. In other words, if you can get that person on the logical train, then you can get him to agree with it. You can get him to assent to it. And that is true also of the demonic. If the demons have an honest moment, they will agree with all that they know about God. But what they cannot exercise is a desire for God.

In fact, they’re angry with God. And that’s what it says in Romans 1:18 and following. It says that the unregenerate who know God, and in an honest moment would agree that there is a God, and in fact do agree with Him by the fact that they worship something other than God, they attest to the fact that there is a sense of divinity in them that presses them to worship. But they hate the God who has revealed Himself in nature. And so they suppress any truth that He gives in unrighteousness.

Now that is an unregenerate Sig. He has a mind that can know Biblical truth. He can even agree with Biblical truth in his most honest moments. But he hates every bit of it, okay?

Now what’s a regenerate Sig? Well, with a regenerate Sig we have to understand this. We have to understand that a dead person is horizontal, right, and not upright.

Don: Meaning?

Jeff: They’re dead. *(Laughter)* You asked for that, Don. *(Laughter)* They’re on the slab.

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I’ll tell you what. I don’t know if you’ve ever had this experience or not. And I’m not sure that everybody has had this experience. But I used to work for a funeral director. And he took me down to pick up a body out of state. And when he went into the morgue, I’ll tell you what. It was a moment I’ll never forget.

When we walked into the morgue it was lunch time. And all the morgue employees were in the office eating. *(Laughter)* They were shoving their mouths full of fries and they had pizza there. And we told them who we were there to pick up.

“Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah!” One guy shoves his mouth full of fries. As he walks off he goes into the cooler and he pulls out this guy. This guy’s in his 30s. He’s buck naked and he’s on a metal gurney, and he’s a mess.

Now I want to tell you something right now. My boss told me after this. He said, “I thought I prepared you for this.” *(Laughter)*

I said, “Well, you were wrong.” *(Laughter)* “You were dead wrong!” Because the guy was a mess. The guy was an absolute mess. And my boss grabs a roll of paper towels and he hands them to me. And he says to me, “Start stuffing up his chest cavity to mop up some of the blood,” some of the juice.

And I just stood there over that body. I stood there and then I looked at him. And he goes, “Oh!” *(Laughter)*

I want to tell you something right now. It was an experience I’ll never forget. But I’ll tell you what. It so deeply embedded in my mind what a dead person is that I’ll never forget it. Because you know what? Oftentimes you go to the funeral home. And when you go to the funeral home people have makeup on them.

I’ll tell you what I’ll never forget. I’ll never forget this. I went to the funeral home of a 16-year-old girl. I pastored her. And she got into a car accident and died.

And I’ll never forget it. I was so deeply hurt by her loss that I didn’t know how I was going to do when I saw her at the funeral home.

And when I walked up to the casket, she was so unrecognizable that it was almost like looking at a different person.

And dead is dead. They don’t see, they don’t hear, they don’t taste, they don’t feel. Dead is dead. And Ephesians 2:1 says that we are dead in our sins and in our transgressions.

What that means is this. It means that we hate God. We have no affection for Him. That’s what it means.

And I’ll tell you what it goes on to say in Ephesians chapter 2. In Ephesians chapter 2 it says that they who were dead in their sins were made alive. That’s verse 4. They were “*made alive*” in Jesus.

Brave Man: Amen.

Jeff: Now what does that mean? That means that God stirred their emotions to desire what they know to be true, and in their honest moments what they agree to be true. But now they don’t hate Him. They love Him. And they want what they know. That is what it means to be regenerate. And you don’t do that to yourself. God does that to you. Go ahead.

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Brave Man: So just the question to you in regard to that. As we encounter and deal with men, because the Word is so obvious and I’m thinking on that, what is the proper way to respond to that, since it is only God who is going to open their hearts? Can we be a catalyst to help them?

Jeff: Yes, right. Okay, so here’s the deal. So Romans 10:9 says that the only person who is going to believe and be saved is the person who believes with his heart and confesses with his mouth.

Transcriber’s Note: Romans 10:9, ESV. *“Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

Jeff: But then he goes on to say, “How is all of this going to happen unless they have a preacher sent to them to preach to them?” And the beautiful corollary to this is Ezekiel 37, where there is a valley of dry bones. And God says to him, “Now listen, prophet. Preach to the dry bones.”

And the prophet said, “What are you talking about?”

And He says, “No, no, no. Preach to the dry bones.” And when he preaches to the dry bones, the bones begin to clatter and assemble, and sinew and muscle and skin begins to form. But they’re still lifeless.

And then what does God say to the prophet? He says, “Now pray to the wind.” What he really says is “Prophesy to the wind.” But I think the point is “pray to the Spirit who gives life.” And he starts to prophesy through the Spirit. And then what begins to happen? Life is breathed into these bodies, and they stand upright and erect.

And I think what He’s saying is this. What I think He is saying is, “You have no power in and of yourselves to bring anyone to life. But I ordained the means by which they will be brought to life, and you are those means.”

And so the person who says, “Well, I can’t do anything anyway, and this is all predestined. God is going to do it. And He’s going to do it to who He wants to do it, and He’s not going to do it to who He doesn’t want to do it,” and so forth. You know, I think Paul says that. “He’ll have mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He’ll harden whom He wants to harden.”

And what we want to say to a person like that is “You haven’t understood the Scriptures.”

Brave Man: Amen.

Jeff: Because the Scriptures say what Paul says. *“I endure everything for the sake of”* who? *“The elect.”* And so Paul’s point is that the elect are God’s business. But the appointed means to bring the elect to faith, that’s my business, because God has made him my business. And so I preach the gospel to everyone and let God sort out who it is who are the elect and who are not. Does that make sense?

Brave Men: Yes.

Jeff: All right. So here is what I want you to understand. What I want you to understand is that it is God’s work to make alive. And when we come to life, we are like a flower garden. Sig is like a flower garden. Look at the pretty petals. Look, he’s a rose, as we all know. *(Laughter)*

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Now what’s the fruit that grows from regeneration, from the Spirit entering our life? It’s repentance and faith. That is the fruit.

Now what is saving faith? Now here’s where they align. Saving faith is knowledge (notitia.) It is assent to that knowledge. And it’s *fiducia*, affections that have been stirred up by God. That is saving faith.

So what I’ve just described to you when I talked about what we call the unitary disposition of Sig, that corresponds with faith. And so faith is the fruit of this regeneration of God in our lives, His bringing us back to life. So when we talk about faith finding approval with God, what we’re saying is this. God approves of what He’s done in us. That’s the important thing. These people did not work and earn God’s approval on their own merits. God made them alive. Faith sprang into existence as the fruit of it. And they exercised it and so found God’s approval. Does that make sense?

Brave Man: Amen.

Jeff: Does anybody have any questions about that? Yes?

Brave Man: (*Unclear*)

Jeff: Well, I’m thinking about Hebrews chapter 11, the Hebrews 11 folks who he just walks through and says, “By faith, by faith, by faith.”

Brave Man: You mean spiritual giants.

Jeff: Yes, I mean people whom we would consider spiritual giants. That’s who he’s using. But remember, at the end he also uses others who were sawn in two.

Brave Man: (*Unclear*)

Jeff: That’s right. He uses Moses and Abraham to create the chapter. Then he has some others that are lesser known, some that aren’t known at all. And then he’s applying it to us and saying that this is for—

Brave Man: Everybody.

Jeff: Yes. We are among this great cloud of witnesses. Yes?

Sig: We’ve got Ted first, Don.

Ted: I mean, there’s a danger when we talk about spiritual giants, because often those men who are judged to be spiritual giants are based on what the world sees, or what you can see with your eyes. There are plenty of humble saints who are giants in their faith who we don’t even see and they died. And they’ve done more than we will ever see. And there are others who we hold up as great paragons of the faith who indeed are quite flawed.

Jeff: Yes. Good.

Ted: Jeff, this may be a side bar that you may not even want to go into. But I just think about this mind, will and emotions. I’ve taken it a different way. That’s tripartite.

Jeff: Well, I’m not going—

Ted: Oh, I know. We don’t want to get off into that discussion. I get the mind and I get the will. But I’m concerned about calling them *emotions*. I tie the desire in with the will and not with the emotions. We can desire to do things that are contrary to our emotions. It seems to me that desire has a—and I might tie the word *affection* in with that. It has a compulsive nature about it. So you believe in your heart, but you have the desire to believe. And that compels you to speak with your mouth. The two follow. It’s not like you

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can desire with your heart and believe in your heart, and then not talk. I mean, the one follows the other. So I’m concerned that when you talk about emotions, it’s more like I get all jazzed up. I go to a Christian rock concert. I met this preacher. And I’m very emotionally worked up. I look at my daughter’s own generation. She’s a millennial. And she went to all the youth group things and they were jumping up and down. Now she doesn’t walk in faith. I mean, I just wonder how solid that was. So I’m not real keen on emotions. I like the words *desire* and *affection* more. Is that okay?

Jeff: Well, yes. And you know, part of our problem is—Do you want to respond to that?

Jim: Yes.

Jeff: Okay, I’ll let you.

Jim: In a sense you’re saying that it’s the emotions. In particular, it’s the love for God. I think what goes on is that many times we have emotions. It isn’t necessarily love for God at that point. You’re loving the music, you’re loving something else, but it isn’t necessarily God.

Jeff: Yes. So for instance, let’s not call it anything. Let’s call it *love*, right? But what I’m saying basically is that love can be described as an emotion, and love can be described as an affection. But we’re dealing with love, right? And so, for instance, I can be worked on from without, and that’s what emotion is. I’m thinking of a passion when I think of an emotion. I can be worked on from without and it can stir up love. And I can think that because I’m stirred up from outside that I’m really exercising true love toward the object of the thing that has stirred me up. Or it’s an affection, that is, that God has entered into my life and stirred this up inwardly, and that He is then the object of my love.

And so that’s the tangled-up mess we’re in with language. But that’s the idea. You know, you can scratch love out and put anything in there that you might think of as an emotion, because whether it’s a passion or an affection it still works, right? It still works in the same way. Yes?

Brave Man: I like what I value. I prefer that word. Values are what is important.

Jeff: Yes. The problem with that is that I then can talk about the morality that I’m in or the cultural mores that I’m in, what is acceptable in my culture. I can talk about the ethos or the ethic of what ought to be in any culture. So that can enter into or exit out of the whole passion/affection discussion, and enter into another discussion of what I ought to do, right?

Don: Jeff, this is a side bar. You were talking about the unregenerate being angry with God.

Jeff: Yes.

Don: But then what about some of the things we see in the Psalms, where people pour their hearts out. “*God, will You forget me forever?*” Or Psalm 88, where there is just total despondency. Is it possible for a believer to be angry with God?

Jeff: Well, you know, I do question whether that’s always anger. I think that it can be, like in Psalm 73 where the Psalmist says, “You know, I looked at everybody around me that’s wicked, and they seem to be prospering. And then I went into the temple and I saw

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what sin deserved in the sacrifice, and then I realized what a beast I was,” right? There’s a foolishness about what he thinks. And I think that can be described as being foolish and even angry with God’s way of doing things. But I’m not sure that every Psalm expresses that same kind of sentiment like Psalm 13 when it says, *“How long, O LORD?”*, right? I’m not sure that expresses the same sentiment as Psalm 73. I actually think that with Psalm 13 it’s just teaching us how we’ve forgotten to pray to God, pleading His covenantal promises to be present with us always. And so what the Psalmist is doing is asking for that very thing. At least that’s my sense of it, Don. That’s kind of a broader description.

Brave Man: In Revelation the saints say the same thing.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely. All right, well listen. I want to finish this. *(Laughter)* Oh yes. Go ahead, Matt.

Matt: This is helpful, the difference between emotions and affections, because the Westminster Confession of Faith says that God has no emotions. Is that always true?

Brave Man: What about love?

Matt: And so He has affections, but not emotions. He’s not outwardly moved.

Jeff: That’s right. So we would say that God has affections. He’s not Aristotle’s static unmoved Mover. There are three Persons in the Godhead. He has affections. He doesn’t have passions. He’s not affected from without. Yes, that’s right. And the Westminster Confession affirms that.

All right. Let’s move on. So by faith we belong. And let’s think now about *this great company*. Now I walked you through some of this last time, so I’m going to go kind of quickly through this. We oftentimes think of this as being a big crowd of spectators. But we’re surrounded by people who have been approved by God.

And there’s a warning. The warning is that what we want are experiences that find God’s approval. We don’t want to judge our own experiences apart from God’s approval by saying, “Well, this is approved by God,” because we can sometimes do that. And we walked through some of these the last time—warning against the unbelieving heart, forsaking the assembly. We want to find our approval in God and what God says is right experience. We are not the determiners of right experience; God is. And so we need to be careful not to shrink back and not to allow ourselves to find approval in ourselves when we try to determine which experiences are correct and which are not correct. All are experiences, but some are not lawful.

So now the question is this. What about being part of this company? We didn’t go here the last time. So we’re talking now about becoming what we are. If it’s God who resurrects us and makes us alive in Jesus Christ, now we are in a sense becoming what we are.

Do you remember the illustration I gave to you about the zygote? The zygote has 46 chromosomes. It’s never going to get another chromosome in its life that’s going to grow into the chromosomes that it already has. So this zygote is going to walk through the stages and eventually become an adult, full-grown human being, on the basis of the genetic information that he already has as a zygote. So there’s a sense in which the zygote

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is as human as it will ever be. It’s not going to get more genetic information. But it is going to grow into a human being that it is, right?

And so there is a sense in which we are as Christian as we ever will be the moment we are made alive in Christ. And yet we are growing up into what and who we are in Christ. So that’s what we’re talking about when we talk about becoming what we are, becoming part of the community by faith.

Now he warns us against sluggishness. I saw that. There’s someone over here yawning right on cue. *(Laughter)* That was great, it was good. All right. He warns us against this kind of experience. But my question is this. I’m just going to slow down because we’ll get through it. We’ll get through it one way or another today. *(Laughter)* But here’s my question to you. Somebody comes to you and says, “Wait a minute! What do I tell somebody who comes to me and says, ‘You know, you talk about this race that I’m supposed to be running, and I’m trying to run this race. Tell me what to do.’ What do you tell somebody?”

Well, I think that you can take this next segment, and this can be what you tell somebody when you answer the question. How do I become what I already am? Or how do I run this race? Or how do I engage the Christian life? I think this becomes where the rubber meets the road, the point. So what do you tell them?

Well first, I think you tell them to run. Do you ever talk to that person who says, “Yeah, I just need to get in shape,” that sort of thing, right? And then you say, “Well, what have you tried?”

And then they say, “Well, I’ve read some books on it, and there are some Internet articles on this. And I’ve talked to the wife a little bit about it. And we ought to buy some healthier groceries.” *(Laughter)* “And I’ve stopped eating Ruffles and I’m watching some exercise programs to make sure I’m getting it right,” and that sort of thing.

And so then you say to them, “Well, did you actually ever try exercising?”

“Well, I’m kind of working up to that.” *(Laughter)* It’s like the person who says, “I want to run the marathon. And I’m reading all the books about the marathon and I’m learning about the diets and stuff. But I’ve never ran it.”

Transcriber’s Note: A person from an upcoming exercise program heckles Jeff.

Jeff: Don’t you dare!

Mike Davis: You’ll have to eat your words. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Okay, yeah. You guys are tough. *(Laughter)* See you at nine. No? *(Laughter)* I want to make sure that I don’t mess you up on this. What time do we exercise?

Mike: Seven.

Jeff: Seven! See you at seven! *(Laughter)* But you see the point. The point is that at some point you have to say to the person, “Run!”

“Well, I’ve never done any running.”

“Who cares?” You know, I have this friend of mine who used to run. He probably still runs. He was an excellent cross-country runner. I mean, he had the form down. This guy really knows how to run. He reads all the signs and puts it into practice. I’m not there; I’m just trying to get through the first half-mile, you know? I look like a gangling fool out there running, right? But who cares? You get out there and you run, and you learn as you

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go. You’re becoming what you are. And so I think the first thing you have to say is, “Run!”

Now here is what holds people up. What holds people up is that it’s not easy to run. And it’s not easy to engage the Christian life. And here’s the beautiful thing about this. Notice what it says in this text. It describes this race as *agon*, an agony. What does that sound like? It sounds like the word from which we get our word *agony*.

And what is he saying? He’s not mincing words. He’s not sugar-coating this thing. He is saying that this thing called the Christian life is *agon*. It is a conflict. It is a fight. It is difficult. And that’s exactly why most people don’t engage.

And we simply have to say to people, of course it’s going to be a battle. And of course you’re going to get knocked down. But the Christian life is a battle, and you need to get up and you need to start running again. So that’s it.

Jim: You know, Barna said recently and has done research which says that something like over 80% of Christians in America are content with where they are spiritually. They have no interest whatsoever in growing.

Jeff: Yes. And you know, part of the problem is that when we think about people in the Christian life today, part of that contentment comes from allowing the world to leaven what we think about the Christian life.

So for instance, you know, if premarital sex is off limits according to the Scriptures, but I’m being led in that direction, if I’m being tempted in that direction, and the world is telling me, even people in the church are telling me that it’s okay, then what does that do? That creates a contentment in sin.

I mean, look. I want to tell you something. I was really surprised. I know a number of single people in the dating world today, because they’ve either been divorced or they’re widows and widowers. And they’ve come and told me. They’ve said to me that the difficult thing about being a single person, not just in the world but in the church, is that there is pressure to have sexual intimacy outside of marriage.

I said, “Even among professing Christians?”

They said, “Even among professing Christians.”

Now that’s part of what you’re talking about. If what is allowable in the outside world has crept into the church, then that doesn’t sound like much of an *agon* to me, does it? I mean, if that’s the way it is and you think that’s the way I ought to go, that’s not an agony, because you’re saying yes. Yes?

Ted: It’s very interesting to listen to the dynamic. As soon as you began to talk about sex, everybody got very quiet, even those who have side conversations in the back of the room. (*Laughter*) But this idea is not a strange idea. It’s anything we want to do.

Jeff: Right.

Ted: One day I said, “I want to run a marathon.” So I found an advertisement for the Virginia Beach Marathon in March. It was October. And I started that up and I said, “That’s what I want to do.” And I agonized every day over that. But I got up and ran. Because, you see, it’s anything in life, whatever, business success or whatever. I mean, it’s not a strange concept. The strange concept is that we’re being told, but especially in

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this year of 2019, that things come easily, that it doesn't take into account that you have to do your six miles every day and your twenty miles on the weekend.

Jeff: Yes, that's right, absolutely.

Ted: We're guaranteed, even if we don't want to work.

Bob Busted: Jeff, as an old man I'm not too tempted by sex. (*Laughter*) But I suppose it's also possible that being an older guy I have walked in faith and still have the agony that's involved in walking.

Jeff: Yes, that's right.

Bob: Without running.

Jeff: Yes, that's right.

Sig: Jeff, my experience before I got married was that a lot of the temptations of young single Christian men that it became okay as sexual intimacy. And I think in a lot of ways in the '60s and '70s that has crept out of the church and it became even more prolific in the culture. I mean, I grew up in the summer of love. I could tell you some wild stories of people—

Jeff: Anyway,-- (*Laughter*) But there's more of a strategy than just running. There is a strategy that we ought to engage in, and he tells us that strategy. He says what you ought to do, and there is a general admonition. You ought to get rid of encumbrances or weights, things that get in the way.

Now I want you to think about that for just a minute. That word doesn't necessarily mean sin. That word means things that have a tendency to draw you away from faithfulness, from fixing your eyes upon Christ.

You know, I'll tell you what I'll never forget. Back in the day there was a pastor who mentored me a bit. He was a power lifter. And he knew that I needed to hear this story. He basically told me that in his prime that he wasn't always a pastor. He was in the secular work force. And he said that one day he realized that his entire life, though he was a Christian, was scheduled around schedules of eating, schedules of working out, all kinds of things that went into becoming a power lifter.

And he said, “I had to say this to myself. I'm going to stop.” I don't remember now how long he stopped. But he said, “I'm going to stop this for a period of several months because I need to.”

Now there's nothing sinful about weight lifting. But it was an encumbrance. It was getting in his way, or so he thought, of faithfulness, and he needed to put it off for a while in order to get his priorities right. And I think that's the idea that's here.

And let me tell you the problem with this kind of thing. I am totally for our brother's counsel. But here is where I think we have to be absolutely careful, absolutely careful. We are told to confront sin in our brothers' lives, not encumbrances. We may be good enough friends to go to a brother and say, “You know, brother, I just want to ask you about this, because it's not a sin. But it seems that you're giving yourself to this,” right?

And you know, I'll tell you. I'll never forget. This is too long of a story so I'm not going to tell it. I'll try to tell it to you on another occasion. But I think that we need to be careful about that. We need to be careful about becoming the Holy Spirit to others in matters that are not sin, okay?

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But then there *are* matters that are sins. And those sinful things entangle us. Now when you think about this, you can either see this word as an active or a passive word. If it's passive, it's the sin that distracts. If it's actively translated, it's the sin that pulls us away.

And here is the point that I make to you. Whether it distracts or attacks, it entangles nonetheless. So it doesn't really matter how you translate it, either actively or passively. The problem is that it's sin that entangles. And that's the kind of thing that has to be put off. It has to be put off. And you can put whatever sin you want in there. You have to put it off; you have to. And I wish we had more time for it.

But I'm going to move on and say that the third thing you'd say is, “You need to run with endurance.” You need to engage this agonizing experience with a strategy, getting rid of the things that are encumbrances and putting off the sin that so easily entangles, and you need to just run enduringly.

Now you've heard me use this before. I love the weight-lifting example of the power lifter or rather the Olympic lifter, who has to throw the weight up and then he has to wait for the green light, saying that the lift is a good lift. And here's the great thing. The great thing is that he has to look like he's calm. (*Laughter*) You know, every muscle fiber in him is screaming, *put it down!!* And yet he has to look like it's not a big deal, right?

And that's the strength under control that we have to have when we run this race. And so we need to run with endurance. There are some other things that we could say, but this is the general advice. Don't wear street clothes. Don't fail to train. And endure when you're training. (*Laughter*) Ya like that? I knew you'd like that.

All right. So let's move to this last point that I want to share with you when we think about *the Leader* here. And I think the spark should be clicking when we have Christ here described as “*the Author and the Finisher of our faith.*” In other words, if this is all true, if He's the One who has made us alive, then we will continue to be alive because He made us alive, and the fruit will continue to pop up in our lives because we are sustained by Him. We often talk about this as *the perseverance of the saints*. But it's better described as *the perseverance of God in the saints*, right?

Brave Man: Amen.

Jeff: And so He is “*the Author and the Finisher of our faith.*” And therefore we find our approval before God in Christ.

Now God is the One who grants approval. Let me simply say this. It's like a father who rewards a child for doing what he's supposed to do. That's how we ought to think about approval. God doesn't owe us approval. But God approves us because we are in Christ.

I'm getting a quizzical look. So let me put it this way. This is part of the Christian life lived out, right? I can say this. My dad tells me to clean my room. I can say, “Dad loves me; I don't need to clean my room,” right? And when he comes home and I have to clean my room, he loves me. Or I can say this. I can say, “Oh, Dad said I'd better clean my room. I need to earn my father's love and so therefore I need to go and clean my room.”

Those are both wrong. But what we do is that we say, “Dad said to clean my room. My dad loves me. He's going to love me no matter what. But he asked me to clean my

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room and I respect him and he loves me. And I’m going to clean my room because of that.” That’s the proper way to understand it.

So when he comes home, he looks at my room and he says, “Oh, you’re an unprofitable servant,” right? (*Laughter*) “But I’m going to reward you anyway,” right? He bestows rewards on us for doing that which it was our duty to do. And that’s the beautiful thing about it when we think about life in Christ.

Now I think there’s a parallel here and I just want to take you through this quickly. I may just cut some things out of it. But it says that *“for the joy set before Him He endured the cross.”*

Now what is that joy? Any number of things. I think that it’s probably the future session of Christ at the Father’s right hand. But John Stott talks about there being a parallel in 1 Timothy 6:12 with the Christian life that we find here and the way it’s expounded here in Christ.

Transcriber’s Note: 1 Timothy 6:12, NKJV. *“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”*

Jeff: And what he does is he says this. He says, *“In 1 Timothy 6:12 it says that Jesus, in one sense, fought the good fight, sort of a parallel to run the race for us. He made the good confession, which is in some sense parallel”* to what? Endure; run with endurance. *“And He sat down at the right hand of the Father,”* which is the approval that we will find in God.

Now my point to you in bringing this parallel is this. If we keep our eyes on Jesus Christ, then we’re in the race well-fought. Why? Because He endured. Now what’s the payoff? Because He endured, we will endure. And that’s really the payoff. And I realize that last part was far too brief. But if you just remember that you are to look to Christ, which is what the writer here says, look to Christ. Why? Because in His endurance you endure. Then you understand why you are to look to Christ, because when you’re feeling weak, you don’t say, “I need to tighten things up.” You say, “I need to look to Christ.” When you’re feeling strong and tempted to feel like you’re meriting something before God because you’re so strong, you need to look to Christ. And you need to realize that it’s not because of anything in me, whether weak or strong, that I endure. It is because Christ endured that I endure. Does that make sense? Okay. Well, we’ll end there unless you have questions. Yes, Don?

Don: Bruce has often said that we are a love gift to Christ. And I’m wondering if part of that joy is when Christ said in John 17:24 when He said, *“Father, I desire that those You have given Me will be with Me where I am.”* Could that be part of the joy also?

Jeff: Well, I think it is. And I think that when you think about the session of Christ it’s so much more than just what you think about when you think about being seated at the Father’s right hand. I think, for instance, that there is the outpouring of the Spirit, which is part of His continuing work. I think there is His priestly intercession which continues to go on, where He basically continues to intercede on our behalf, that what He has earned will be given to us by grace. So I think there is an activity of Christ that continues on, which is part of what you’re referring to, Don. Yes. Does that make sense?

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Don: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: Anybody else? No? Okay, let’s pray then. Father, thank You for this day, for the time. Thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ and the abundance of blessing that we have in Him. Father, thank You that You are so good, having saved us when we were yet sinners. Bless us now, Father, as we run. Help us to cast off the encumbrances. Help us to stay disentangled from our sins. And Father, help us to endure, for we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. (*Applause*)