Stay Focused on Jesus

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Carl Stuart Hamblen lived a life that most young men would dream about. Born in Texas in 1908, he became one of the radio's first singing cowboys. His radio program became famous. He wrote songs for Gene Autry and Roy Rogers. He also acted in some of their films. Plus, he became a great horseback rider and became all around cowboy rodeo champ in 1935 and 1936. He then started to raise race horses and became very successful in that field. He even became friends with John Wayne and they would hunt together. He had it all or did he. Like most people, he couldn't find real happiness in these earthly things. He then started to drink alcohol very heavily. His wife got him to go to a conference that Rev. Billy Graham was speaking at. Carl Stuart was not a fan of Christianity even though he grew up with a father who was a Methodist preacher. The drinking was becoming worse and after some other events including heavy gambling on the horses, he decided to go to a Billy Graham crusade in Los Angeles in 1949. He left after his first visit saying he would not go back, but something was making him uncomfortable. He was under such heavy conviction because of sin and his wife kept pushing him to go back to the crusade, he couldn't wait. He called Billy Graham early in the morning and asked if he could come over. Billy Graham said yes and they prayed together and Carl Stuart, that famous singing cowboy told Jesus he was a sinner and he asked for Jesus' forgiveness. He became a new person through Jesus Christ. Carl Stuart stopped drinking alcohol and stopped gambling – plus, he sold his race horses. Then, he became a famous song writer for gospel music writing songs like, It is No Secret What God Can Do, This Ole House, and Open Up Your Heart and Let the Sunshine In. However, if you hear his testimony, you find that his faith would be tested sometimes after his life changing event, which we'll talk about a little bit later. Being a Christian isn't always easy. Events come our way that we don't know how to handle or not sure what right choices we need to make. At times, these events can cause us to lose

focus mentally on our faith in Jesus Christ. What do I mean by this? Let's look at some Scripture that can shine light on this.

Let's first turn to Hebrews 3: 1-6 where we read this, "**3** Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest.[2] He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house.[3] Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself.[4] For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.[5] "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house,"[a] bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future.[6] But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory. (NIV – www.biblegateway.com)

In the chapter before, the Hebrews writer had just put down to the Jews why Jesus is now their High Priest and their perfect sacrifice. Plus, Jesus is greater than the angels. All of this was important for the Jews who still wanted to cling to Old Testament ways and had a hard time realizing Jesus was truly the Son of God. Now, the writer starts by reminding them that they are holy brothers and sisters who share in this heavenly calling because of Jesus. It is Jesus that makes them holy, not the rituals of old. So, these holy brothers and sisters (Christians) are to "fix their thoughts on Jesus". Some other translations use the term "consider". I looked up the Greek term used here and it's "katanoeo" which means consider, pay attention. Plus, it adds this: this Greek word has a strong implication that the attention paid is intense (Strong's Concordance)". So, the Hebrew writer is not just saying fix your thoughts on Jesus. He is saying fix your thoughts on Jesus with intensity. He then spends time telling us how Jesus is greater than Moses, who the Jews cherished – he was an Old Testament hero to them. Moses led the people through the Tabernacle ways of worship in the "house" in verse 3. While Jesus is now above Moses because He is the Son over God's house (verse 6) and "we" are the house. Sometimes when we hear the word "church" we think of a building. However, to God, the church is us – the people because of what Jesus

did at the cross. So, we are God's Church. His Spirit is what lives inside us to make us His Church. Apostle Paul states this in 1 Corinthains 6: 19-20, "Or don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. (NLT)" We do not belong to ourselves, God has bought us and it came at a high price – the life of Jesus Christ as our sacrifice to make all this possible. So, this would make sense why the Hebrew writer would say fix our eyes on Jesus with intensity. Al definition for intensity is degree of being intense – meaning extreme strength, force, energy, feeling, or concentration. We are we fix our thought on Jesus with extreme strength, force, with all our energy, feeling and concentration. Why?

You see, the writer here knew his fellow people. The Israelites were always turning away from God in the Old Testament. They were hardly happy about anything. They would always do something rebellious toward God and we do as well today. Let's continue with Hebrews 3 and turn to verses 7 - 11"[7] So, as the Holy Spirit says:

"Today, if you hear his voice,
[8] do not harden your hearts
as you did in the rebellion,
during the time of testing in the wilderness,
[9] where your ancestors tested and tried me,
though for forty years they saw what I did.
[10] That is why I was angry with that generation;
I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray,
and they have not known my ways.'
[11] So I declared on oath in my anger,
'They shall never enter my rest.' "[b]
(NIV- www.biblegateway.com)

The Holy Spirit tells us through Psalm 95: 7-11 (text used by writer), that the Christians during this time were not to harden their hearts against God as did their ancestors did during the wilderness years or during Moses' leadership. The Church was not to follow their old path of hardening their hearts against God.

This is why fixing our eyes upon Jesus with intensity is so important. It is easy to have one's heart become harden against God and one may not even know or realize it. To harden one's heart means to make heart obstinate or make stubborn (Strong's Concordance). Let's use an example from Stuart Hamblen. After he became a Christian, he stopped drinking, gambling, and saying bad words. He stated this in his testimony. He continued on his radio program that was very successful at that time. After a while, his producer came to him and told him they had a new sponsor for the program and it was a beer company. Mr. Hamblen told his producer there was no way he would do a program that would have beer commercials in it. For one thing, it would hurt his testimony about losing his taste for beer when Jesus came into his heart. The other reason is it would hurt the Gospel Message about Jesus Christ. His producer told him if he didn't go along with the sponsor, he would be fired. He was fired and he went home and cried. His wife reminded him what Jesus had to go through and He made the choice to stay focused on Jesus. The other choice he could have made was to become bitter about the job loss. Over time, his heart would become hardened to the point where his relationship with Jesus would become dull. This can happen when we get depressed or worry over a long period of time. We start to blame God for our problems even though we may not say it out loud, but by not praying as much or stop studying God's Word is hard signs of the hardening of the heart against the Lord. Israel's hearts were always going astray when they allowed their hearts to become hardened. We often tie in a harden heart to Pharoh in Egypt during Moses' time, but we can harden our hearts as well today as Pharoh did over three thousand years ago. We didn't even mention one of the easiest ways to get a hardened heart toward God and that is through discouragement. Life can be so discouraging at times. We can be discouraged by health issues, temptations, or through world events that keep getting worst and worst. If we keep focused on them, our focus on Jesus will become weaker and weaker. It's hard to focus on two things at the same time. I bought an exercise machine you put under your desk to work your legs and ankles. It's made so you can exercise and do paper work at the same time. Well, that doesn't work as great as it may sound. I can do both work and exercise, but my quality of work goes down because something

else is taking a small percentage away of my focus on my work and that is the exercise machine, especially when it automatically changes speed. The same can be said about fixing our eyes on Jesus intensely. This does take work on our part. When trials and sufferings come, we must make up our minds to not allow these events to lose our intense focus on Jesus. We have to hand these events over to Him and allow the Holy Spirit to do His thing in our lives whatever what that may be. If we allow ourselves to focus on our troubles while at the same time allowing these troubles to harden our heart without us knowing it, it can lead us to sin.

The Hebrew continues with this in Hebrews 3: 12-19

12 See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart
that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as
it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's
deceitfulness. 14 We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original
conviction firmly to the very end. 15 As has just been said:

"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts
as you did in the rebellion."[c]
16 Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out
of Egypt? 17 And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those
who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did God
swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? 19 So we
see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief. (NIV-
www.biblegateway.com)

So, we encourage one another so that our hearts are not hardened by sin's deceitfulness. The Hebrew writer is writing to the Christian Church here. Christians can harden their hearts against the Lord. Don't let world worries harden your heart against God. Why did so many hymns that we sing came from song writers than wrote songs after some horrible tragedy? They made the choice to not to take the easy road to discouragement, but made the choice to intensify their focus on Jesus by writing a song. We must do the same today. I can seat here now and start complaining about what is going on in the world and before long, I will become discouraged and depressed. I'll start to focus on that

and before long; I'll start to develop a negative view on how the Lord does things and not even realize it until it's too late. We should be intensifying our thoughts on Jesus as we see what is going on around us. Start praying more, start studying God' Word more, start listening to Gospel music more, and start watching more Christian TV (Bibilcal Christian TV). Let's not give satan material to work with. Fix your thoughts on Jesus "intensely".

*NLT Life Application Study Bible.*Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, 1996

The Strongest Strong's Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001