

“The Sons of Thunder”

(James and John)

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I. Introduction

A. Book by Marshall Goldsmith

1. *“What got you here won’t get you there”*
 - a. What’s holding you back?
 - b. Personal flaws that keep good leaders from becoming great leaders
2. Most of the issues have nothing to do with intelligence
 - a. Behavioral issues
 - b. That annoy and irritate your friends and family
3. Your best friends could probably tell you what they are
 - a. But most of us are afraid to ask
4. The 20 most common interpersonal flaws that hinder people include:
 - a. *Passing judgment on others.*
 - b. *Making sarcastic and cutting remarks that you think make you sound sharp and witty.*
 - c. *Constantly telling other people how smart and talented you are.*
 - d. *Speaking when angry, Losing your temper.*
 - e. *Focusing on the negative in every situation.*
 - f. *Blaming your current problems on events or people from your past.*
 - g. *Insensitivity. Not listening or paying attention to others.*

B. What's holding you back?

1. What's limiting your growth?
 - a. Relationships?
 - b. Promotion on the job?
 - c. Marriage?
 - d. Your spiritual growth?
2. Like trying to run while entangled in heavy chains

3. Hebrew 12:1 *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.*

4. Running with shackles on your legs

C. The story of two brothers

1. Nicknamed the "Sons of Thunder"
 - a. And it wasn't a compliment
2. They were "hindered and entangled"
 - a. Even their best friends got angry at them
3. But once they ***"threw off everything that hindered and entangled"***
4. Wow could they run!

II. Review

A. Luke 6:12-16

(12) One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. (13) When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles (14) Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, (15) Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, (16) Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

B. Calling the Twelve

1. Peter *“The Rock”*
2. Andrew *“The Bringer”*
3. James & John *“The Sons of Thunder”*

III. Background

A. Names: James and John

1. They were brothers
2. Jesus called them “Boanerges” (Mark 3:17)
 - a. Means “The Sons of Thunder”

B. Family: Sons of Zebedee & Salome

1. Zebedee was a man of importance and reputation
 - a. Had a fishing business with hired servants (Mark 1:19-20)
 - b. John was known to the high priest (John 18:15-16)
2. Their mother was Salome
 - a. Possibly the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus (Mat. 27:56; Mark 16:1)
 - b. Would mean they were cousins of Jesus

C. Occupation: Fishermen

1. Partners with Peter and Andrew on the Sea of Galilee

D. Wrote:

1. John wrote:
 - a. The Gospel of John
 - b. I, II & III John
 - c. Revelation
2. James didn't write the Book of James

E. Personality:

1. When we first meet them
 - a. Hot tempered and fiery
 - b. Ambitious to a fault
 - c. Selfish and conceited
2. But they aged well

F. Things you ought to know:

1. Part of the “Big Three”

- a. Peter, James and John
- b. Leaders
- c. Called “pillars of the church” (Galatians 2:9)

2. With Jesus at most intimate times

- a. The Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-33)

(32) They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” (33) He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.

- b. The Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1)

(1) After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. (2) There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.

3. James was the first of the Twelve to be martyred

- a. Acts 12:1-3

(1) It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. (2) He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. (3) When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also.

b. Martyred by Herod Agrippa I in 44 A.D.

c. Tradition adds:

When the guard who led James to the judgment seat saw him bearing his testimony, he was moved, and confessed that he was also a Christian. They were both therefore led away together; and on the way the guard begged James to forgive him. And James, after considering a little, said, "Peace be with you," and kissed him. And thus they were both beheaded at the same time.

d. Why James first?

1. The biggest threat?
2. Man of passion and influence

4. John was the last of the Twelve to die

a. And the only one to die of natural causes

a. Exiled on the Island of Patmos

1. Where he wrote the book of the Revelation

b. Returned to Ephesus (Turkey) where he died an old man

1. John died around A.D. 98, during the reign of Trajan.
2. He was so frail in his final days at Ephesus that he had to be carried into the church.

5. There are misperceptions regarding John

a. In medieval art John is often portrayed as a meek, mild, pale-skinned, effeminate person, lying around on Jesus' shoulder looking up at Him with a dove-eyed stare.

1. Da Vinci and "The Last Supper"
2. Furthered in "The Da Vinci Code" by Dan Brown

b. In reality he was rugged and hard-edged, just like the rest of the fishermen-disciples. He was every bit as intolerant, ambitious, zealous, and explosive as his elder brother, James.

G. James and John had a lot in common

1. *Both were members of the Inner Circle*
2. *Both had rough edges that hindered and entangled them*
 - a. Both had fiery tempers

1. So violent were their tempers that they were prepared to blast a Samaritan village out of existence because it would not give them hospitality when they were on their journey to Jerusalem (*Luke 9:54*).

2. Luke 9:51-56

(51) As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. (52) And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; (53) but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. (54) When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" (55) But Jesus turned and rebuked them, (56) and they went to another village.

- a. Both appeared to be intolerant of others

1. John and his brother James were completely exclusive and intolerant (*Mark 9:38; Luke 9:49*)

- a. Both were ambitious to a fault

1. Either they or their mother Salome had the ambition that when Jesus came into his kingdom, they might be his principal ministers of state

2. Matthew 20:20-24

(20) Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. (21) "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." (22) "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. (23) Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father." (24) When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.

H. They had a number of differences

1. *Their deaths*

- a. James died young
- b. John died of old age (lived another 50 years)

2. *John was the writer*

3. *John was Peter's constant companion*

4. *John was special to Jesus*

- a. Referred to himself as "*the disciple Jesus loved*"
- b. Was asked by Jesus to take care of his mother
 - 1. Peter, "*Feed my sheep*" (John 21:17)
 - 2. John, "*Care for my mother*" (John 19:25-27)

I. But...after they grew up

- 1. Threw off the chains that hindered and entangled them!
- 2. James
 - a. Ultimately, his passions were tempered by sensitivity and grace.
 - b. *Somewhere along the line James learned to control his anger, bridle his tongue, redirect his zeal, eliminate his thirst for revenge, and completely lose his selfish ambition.*
- 3. And John became the personification of unselfish love
 - a. John, the disciple Jesus loved
 - b. John's loving care of Aunt Mary
 - c. John's love letters (I, II, III John)
 - d. John's final years and words
 - 1. It is Jerome who tells the story of the last words of John.

2. When he was dying, his disciples asked him if he had any last message to leave them. *“Little children,”* he said, “love one another.” Again and again he repeated it; and they asked him if that was all he had to say. *“It is enough,”* he said, *“for it is the Lord’s command.”*

e. John learned “balance”

1. Truth and Love

a. “For God so loved the world...”

2. Ambition and humility

3. Suffering and Glory

a. He lived longer...and suffered longer

b. Only disciple we know who witnessed the suffering of Jesus on the cross (John 19:26)

c. Loss of his brother James

4. John in Exile

a. Virtually all reliable sources in early church history attest to the fact that John became the pastor of the church the apostle Paul had founded at Ephesus.

b. From there, during a great persecution of the church under the Roman Emperor Domitian, John was banished to a prison community on Patmos

1. One of the small Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean Sea off the west coast of modern Turkey.

2. He lived in a cave there.

3. It was a harsh environment for an aged man. He was cut off from those whom he loved, treated with cruelty and reproach, and made to sleep on a stone slab with a rock for a pillow as the years passed slowly.

c. But he never complained

d. And it was while there that he received and recorded the apocalyptic visions described in the book of Revelation.

IV. Summary

A. What is hindering and entangling you?

1. *Hebrew 12:1*

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. The Olympics....no baggy clothes
 - a. Limiting your effectiveness?
 - b. Or sagging pants
 1. "Pants on the ground"
3. Reduce your success and effectiveness

B. Things that "hinder and entangle"...and annoy & irritate your friends and family

1. *A Critical Spirit*

- a. Being judgmental of the misfortunes of others
 1. Thinking it could never happen to you
 2. Believing others deserve their misfortunes...and you don't
- b. Making destructive comments, needless sarcasms and cutting remarks that make you feel sharp and witty.
- c. Overusing negative qualifiers like "no," "but," or "however" which secretly say to everyone, "I'm right. You're wrong."
- d. Failing to recognize your prejudices
- e. Always correcting others

2. *Jealousy*

- a. Failing to give proper praise and recognition to others.

- b. Claiming credit that you don't deserve by overstating your contribution to any success.
- c. Secretly hoping others will fail, thus making you look more successful.

3. *Blame*

- a. Making excuses for your failures by refusing to acknowledge your mistakes
- b. Blaming your current misfortune on painful events or people from your past who did you wrong.
- c. Blaming your failure on your parents or your church
- d. The inability to "get over it"

4. *A failure to listen*

- a. Failure to focus on the people around you.
 - 1. Distracted
- b. Thinking about what you're going to say while they're talking
- c. Insensitivity to the feelings of others

5. *Self centered*

- a. Trying to let people know how smart, rich or athletic you are.
- b. Always talking about yourself instead of asking about them
- c. Exaggerating, bragging or name dropping
- d. Thinking you're better than others and that they could have had it too if they had worked as hard as you

6. *Bad work ethic*

- a. A failure to follow through on commitments
 - 1. Quitting ahead of completion
 - 2. Distraction
- b. Poor planning and preparation

- 1. No agenda
- c. Lots of activity...little accomplishment
 - 1. Rocking chair
- d. Failing to strive for excellence
- e. Usually, good things come to those who work hard

7. *Wasting your strengths*

- a. What are you the best at?
- b. Find it and develop it

8. *Fear of failure*

- a. Failure to take risks and experience God
- b. Afraid to try

9. *A lack of personal discipline*

- a. Physically
- b. Vocationally
- c. Educationally
- d. Relationally
- e. Spiritually

10. *Yielding to that sin that so easily hinders and entangles you*

Hebrew 12:1

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.

- a. Your “besetting sin”
- b. Been fighting the same battle all your life

1. You know what it is
- c. Haven't gotten victory yet
 1. A slave to your sin
- d. Can't run while you're "Hindered and entangled"
- e. Like being entangled in chains...shackles
 1. Time to "throw off the chains of sin"