

Hebrews 12:3-12

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[0 : 0 0] This evening we're continuing looking at the book of Hebrews and we're in chapter 12. Graham took us through the first couple of verses last week and we're going to be looking at the next section now. So we're going to read from Hebrews chapter 12 from verse 3 to verse 11.

So if you have a Bible you might like to turn to it, it will be on the screen in the church here. So Hebrews chapter 12 and starting reading at verse 3. And the writer says, Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons.

My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline and do not lose heart when he rebukes you. Because the Lord disciplines those he loves and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons, but what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined and everyone undergoes discipline, then you are illegitimate children and not true ones.

[1 : 1 9] Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for us. How much more should we submit to the father of our spirits and live?

Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best. But God disciplines us for our good that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.

Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. God will bless his word as we consider it together this evening.

Suffering is good for you. You should expect it and you should welcome it. I don't think anyone who is trying to market Christian faith would feel that that was a very effective strapline.

It's much easier to say, smile, Jesus loves you. Or to say, trust in Jesus and everything will be all right. And both of these have truth in them. And yet, the fact that suffering is a good thing for us is something which is very much present throughout the New Testament.

[2 : 4 1] So in James, right at the beginning of his book, James says, Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, when you face trials of many kinds.

Paul says in Romans chapter 5, Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings. And in this passage here, the writer tells us that our sufferings are good for us and that they are thing which our Heavenly Father in his love allows to come upon us.

Suffering is good for us. And we might as well say, well, why is that? In many ways, it's counterintuitive. In our society, we aim for a life that is easy, that is straightforward, and we don't welcome suffering.

I think the answer is that suffering that has a purpose is good. If there is a purpose and an end goal in it, then suffering is worthwhile.

In this passage and in many others, Paul has in mind, some of the time, an athlete, someone who is running in a race. And throughout the New Testament, when this thought of an athlete is in mind, very much what is usually in the writer's forefront of their thinking, is that it requires a great effort.

[4 : 15] We need to be disciplined. We need to work hard if we're going to win the prize. And so there is a purpose in the suffering that people go through in that kind of situation.

And the writer here says there is a purpose too in our suffering. There was a purpose in the Lord's suffering. That was in verses 1 and 2 that Graham brought to us last week.

He endured the cross for the joy that was set before him. His purpose was, first of all, to please and be obedient to his Father, and secondly, to bring us into a living relationship with God where our sins can be forgiven and we can have eternal life.

And because of the purpose that the Lord Jesus saw in his suffering, he endured it patiently. And so the writer says, in our suffering there is a purpose.

And therefore it is worthwhile, and it is something which we should, in some sense, welcome. And that purpose is that we should become more like Jesus.

[5 : 30] The writer here describes it in terms of a harvest of righteousness and peace. And that very much is becoming more like Jesus, isn't it?

Having his righteousness and the peace that he alone can bring. I quote it from James and from Romans. So in James, if I finish the quotation, James says, Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Let perseverance finish its work, so that you may become mature and complete, not lacking anything. Again, it is really so you may become like Jesus.

Or the passage in Romans chapter 5, Paul writes, Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings. Why? Because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

So the purpose of our suffering is that we may develop endurance, that we may develop character, that we may develop maturity, that our hope may be holy in Christ, and that we may know the daily presence of his Spirit in us.

[7 : 04] We could see, I think, that Christ's suffering was for our justification. Much more than that, of course, but Christ's suffering was for our justification. Our suffering that God allows to come on us is for our sanctification, that we may become more holy, that we may become more like Jesus.

If you don't get anything else away from what I say this evening, just take that God has a purpose in our suffering, that through it, we should become more like Jesus.

We're going to go through the verses very quickly in a few minutes, but before we do that, I want to address two difficulties that I see in this passage. There's one difficulty that's cultural, and there's one difficulty that's doctrinal.

So the cultural difficulty. The writer here is clearly envisaging fathers disciplining their sons. Again, there's a cultural thing. It could be fathers or mothers now. It could be sons or daughters.

But there is a cultural thing there. But the big cultural thing is the author is envisaging that they will discipline them through physical punishment, through what we used to call corporal punishment.

[8 : 16] The verses currently at the end of verse 6, where it says in this verse, he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Actually, the literal translation would be he flogs everyone he accepts as a son.

And the cultural issue with that is that in our society today, many people would feel that physical punishment of children is unacceptable. Indeed, it's about to become illegal in Scotland in the next couple of months.

Let me just say two things. I'm sure there will be views on both sides in this among those who are listening. So let me just say two things about it. The first thing I would say is I think we need to accept that up until at least one generation ago, if not closer than that, physical punishment of children was accepted as being normal and right.

And whatever we think of the ethics and the effectiveness of it, I think we need to accept that when it was properly applied, it was done in a loving way by those who cared for their children and who believed it was the best way to train them.

So we shouldn't look back in a passage like this and say, this is something which is terrible. It's a practice we wouldn't do today. Therefore, we should ignore it. Second thing I want to say, though, is that in our society, the fact that we don't strike our children when they're disobedient and discipline them in that way doesn't mean that children aren't and shouldn't be disciplined.

[9 : 48] A good parent will still discipline their children. Now, they might do it by withdrawing privileges. They might have a naughty step, all sorts of ways in which it can happen.

But disciplining of children should still very much be part of our culture today. Where there is no disciplining, children will grow up as spoiled and not understanding the need to be a good citizen, to be unselfish, and ultimately they will not mature into responsible adults.

So in a sense, the physical punishment is a bit of a side issue in this if we're bothered about it. The fact is that disciplining is still necessary and it's still unpleasant.

If you withdraw a privilege from a child, they're going to be very unhappy about it and it might hurt you as a parent to have to do that, but it is a necessary thing to teach and train them.

And so the context here is that parents discipline their children and God disciplines us. We don't have the theological, doctrinal difficulty.

[10 : 59] And this is that we know that Jesus took the punishment for our sins on the cross. That he took everything that was owed by us or all the sin or all the dirt in our lives, he took on himself so that we could be forgiven for it.

And we might say, well then if that's the case, why does it talk here about God punishing us? Does that mean that our sins are being punished twice, once for Christ on the cross and once in our lives?

Well, no, it doesn't. And I think we're much better at looking at this passage and thinking of it in terms of corrective discipline or of rebuke from God, of God trying to help us to see the wrong in our lives and to put it right.

We could never take the full punishment for our sins in this life and we don't need to. Christ has taken all that was due by us. But God still needs, as a father, as a loving heavenly father, he needs to correct us, he needs to rebuke us, he needs to put us on the right path and he does that in love.

And that is one of the key things we'll see as we go along this evening. So let's look at the passage now and I've got four headings which hopefully will be helpful.

[12 : 25] So verses three and four, I've headed, remember God's son. Remember God's son. So verse three, the writer says, consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

And the bridge here is that the writer is taking Christ's sufferings. He's then going to talk about our sufferings. And he says really two things about it.

The first is that when we suffer, Christ should be our inspiration. The one who encourages us to go on and to persevere as he did.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men. And if we face suffering in our lives and we all do to a greater or lesser extent and some obviously much more than others, what we should do is we should consider the sufferings of Christ and recognise the way in which he came through them.

The way in which he submitted himself perfectly to God's will. And that should be the inspiration for us too to go through and to endure.

[13 : 45] And that is not just our inspiration, but Christ is our example. And that's what the writer is talking about in verse four, I think. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

What is the point of that? It is that Christ did suffer. He did shed his blood for us. Now maybe some of those that the writer here is addressing will at a later stage face the ultimate sacrifice.

They may well be martyred for their faith. But he says, Christ has suffered much more than you ever will. Follow his example.

As in everything in life, if we can strive to be like Christ, then we will be doing God's will and we will grow to be mature Christian people.

Christ is our inspiration and Christ is our example when we face suffering. We need to remember God's son.

[14 : 50] Verses five and six, I've headed, remember God's word. Now these verses are principally a quotation from the book of Proverbs. And the writer here is taking an Old Testament passage and as New Testament writers do, he's expanding on it and he's applying it to the situation.

And he says, have you forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons? Quite interesting that the word that's translated encouragement here is the same word that's used as the Holy Spirit in John's Gospel, translated comfort or a counselor generally in our versions of the Bible.

It is the same word the writer is using here, the same root word when he says that it is a word of encouragement that is given in Proverbs. You might not think it sounds very much like a word of encouragement, but certainly a word of good advice.

It is good counsel. And so the writer says, first of all, do not make light of the Lord's discipline.

There are two dangers that the author is addressing here. And the first is that we don't recognize or don't take seriously the suffering that we face in our lives.

[16 : 13] The thought here when he talks about making light is very much the same thought as early in the chapter when he talks about the Lord Jesus despising the shame, not thinking nothing of the shame that came upon him.

And that was because he was suffering for us. What the writer says in this case is not a good thing to make light of what's happening here. If we suffer, let's think about why are we suffering?

Now scripture makes it very clear there's not a one-to-one connection between sin and suffering. It's not always the case that we do something wrong and then we suffer for it.

And yet it is true that the scripture here is teaching that when we suffer we should examine ourselves and should say well what is it that God is teaching me through my suffering?

When something goes wrong in my life is this God speaking to me and bringing to my attention something that needs corrected? And it's very dangerous just to look at suffering and to thole it to suffer it and not to think well what is it that God is saying to me through it?

[17 : 30] There's a slight irony I think here that the situation that Paul is thinking about is people who are particularly suffering through persecution. So it's actually those who are making a stand for Jesus who are suffering.

And that is why he goes on to talk about suffering as sons. So it's not because they're particularly bad people that God is disciplining them. Rather it's because they are people who are close to him who are living for him but who still need to grow in their faith who still need to repent of sins in their lives.

And so when we suffer in whatever way we do in our lives let's make sure that we ask that question is there something that God is saying to me through this is there something I need to address that God is drawing to my attention.

But then alongside that the writer says do not make light of the Lord's suffering and do not lose heart when he rebukes you. So on the one side there's the danger that we suffer and we don't really think about it and it doesn't make any difference to us.

On the other side there's the danger that we suffer and we think oh God must have rejected me that I'm going through this terrible time in my life I'm losing heart I don't know if I can keep going in my Christian faith.

[18 : 57] And the writer says we mustn't have that attitude either. If we suffer God will give us the grace to endure our suffering if we trust in him and depend on him for it.

he will not let us be tested beyond what we can bear as 1 Corinthians chapter 10. So God when he allows us to suffer he does it in a way that there is a way for us to come through it and to come through it not with our faith weakened not with a feeling of resentment towards God but rather with our faith strengthened as we recognise that God is working in our lives.

And so the writer here introduces through the quote from Proverbs what he's going to be covering particularly in the next few verses. God the Lord disciplines those he loves and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

And that is the theme of verses 7 to 9. I've called it remember God's love. Remember God's son remember God's word remember God's love.

And the writer says God only disciplines us because he loves us. He doesn't discipline us despite his love for us.

[20 : 22] He disciplines us because of his love for us. And he draws the analogy that we touched on briefly earlier of human parents.

Now let's recognise at this point that not all parents fit in the model that is described here. There are parents who are very bad parents.

There are parents who are cruel who are abusive towards their children. There are parents who neglect their children. Now some of us have been very blessed that we have had godly parents who have brought us up well have disciplined us well have shown us real love.

But I recognise there may be some for whom that's not the case. Whether it is or not I think we can understand how what God does for us through disciplining us relates to what a good human parent would do.

That it is a demonstration of his love for us. And the writer talks about legitimate and illegitimate children. He talks about those who are truly loved by their father and those who aren't really part of the family.

[21 : 38] And it is those who are really part of the family who are God's children who experience his disciplining because he loves us.

And our disciplining by God should bring us into a deeper experience of him. Disciplining isn't a sign that God doesn't care.

it's a sign that he does care. And when we recognize that as the writer says it will lead not to resentment but to respect.

We respected our human fathers the good human fathers it says because of their loving discipline. How much more great New Testament phrase how much more should we submit to the father of our spirits and live.

How much more should we recognize what God is doing in us and should recognize that is for our good and unlike human fathers and human mothers God never gets it wrong.

[22 : 47] He always does what is for our good. He never does it from selfish motives as any parent probably at times does. He does it always for our good. And then finally in verses 10 and 11 I've headed this remember God's purpose.

Remember God's purpose. Remember God's son. Remember God's word. Remember God's love. Remember God's purpose. As we said at the beginning suffering with a purpose is beneficial to us and therefore can be welcome.

We can find joy even in the most adverse circumstances. And the reason for that is that ultimately through our suffering we develop Christian character.

Now there's a short term and a longer term thing I think here. So verse 10 it says God disciplines for us as for our good that we may share in his holiness.

Now that has a long term implication but perhaps it's a short term one as well. As we understand that God is disciplining us of the suffering in our life is a kind of wake up call from God to do away with some sin in our lives.

[24 : 06] So we put away that sin we become more holy more set apart for God and we try to live lives that are pleasing to the Lord Jesus that are not resisting his will.

So there's a short term benefit that it makes us more holy it makes us more devoted to God. But then there's a long term benefit the writer says no discipline seems present at the time but painful later on however it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace.

So those who have suffered and have recognised the Lord's hand in their suffering they mature as Christians and there is a harvest.

Now the whole thought of a harvest is it is something that happens after a period. You sow your seed in the spring and in the autumn while being well you have your harvest.

And so it is here that we sow or God sows throughout our lives in disciplining us and teaching us and training us and over time we mature and then there is a true harvest in us.

[25 : 20] A harvest of righteousness and peace. Righteousness of being more conformed to God's will, of living lives that are better for him, of doing away with the sin that so easily besets us, which we talked about earlier in the chapter.

Peace that we have in us, that inner peace that comes from our knowledge of the Lord Jesus and from having true confidence in him. And when people have suffered, it does make a difference to their lives if they have recognized God's hand and been willing to be obedient to him.

John Stott said, there is always an indefinable something about people who have suffered. They have a fragrance which others lack.

They exhibit the meekness and gentleness of Christ. I'm sure all of us can look at Christians we've known who've suffered greatly in their lives, perhaps are still suffering greatly, and we look at them and say, what a lovely character they have.

How Christ-like they are in their sufferings. And that comes about because they recognized God's hand when they were suffering, suffering, and they made every effort to live like Jesus, to become like Jesus, and to recognize that God is molding them into the image of his son.

[26 : 57] And as we mature, as with children, as they grow older, if they have been brought up well, if they have been disciplined well when they are young, then they become mature adults, responsible citizens in our society.

And they don't need then the same discipline because they are self-disciplined. They have learned discipline and they don't need a parent constantly to be reminding them of it.

And so it is in the Christian faith. As we accept God's discipline, perhaps when we're young, but could be at any stage in our lives, then we get more and more self-disciplined and able to live for Jesus and not to need God's correction.

Yesterday afternoon I was watching the UK Athletic Championships on television, obviously very, like every sports event, rather strange at the moment, no spectators round about, just the athletes competing.

And I was quite struck by one of the winners when they got interviewed after the event. One of the winners said something along these lines. I was really worried going into lockdown because I didn't know how I would get on without my coach to encourage me and to urge me on.

[28 : 17] I didn't know whether I could keep going. But because I had been trained and built up the disciplines that I needed in my training, because I knew what the goal was and what I needed to do to get there, I was able to achieve it.

In other words, having been disciplined, having been taught by their coach, having been urged on through pain and through difficulty as they sought to get better and better.

When they didn't have the coach there, they were able to keep going because they had developed, they had matured, they were themselves disciplined. And that is what we are aiming for.

We are aiming that we get to a position where we are obedient to God, where we have grown in him and we don't need to the same extent his disciplining of us.

It will still come. We all still fail, but as we become more like Jesus, it becomes less and less necessary. So four points there then.

[29 : 27] Four things to take away. Remember God's son. Remember Jesus who is our inspiration and our example. Remember God's word.

Remember the writer to the Proverbs and how he encourages us not to be downhearted or to ignore God's discipline but rather to learn from it.

Remember God's love that when he disciplines us it's not a sign he doesn't care, it's a sign of how much he does care. And remember God's purpose that in all our suffering God has the purpose that we may grow to Christian maturity, that we may become more like Jesus.

Let me finish by quoting from I think one of the greatest Christians of the last hundred years, Dr. Helen Rosevear. Now many of you will probably know Helen Rosevear's story.

When she was a student she felt the call to missionary work and she went to the Congo. She worked as a doctor, she trained other medical people, she set up medical facilities there, she did a tremendous work for the Lord.

[30 : 39] And then there was a civil war in the Congo and Helen Rosevear along with other colleagues was captured by the rebel forces and she was brutally beaten up and raped and left in a dreadful physical condition.

And she was at the point where she was thinking I'm not sure I can go on. I'm not sure I can bear this. And while she was thinking that she became very aware of the presence of the Lord Jesus with her.

And she recognized that her suffering was not something that should break her, not something she should shy away from and think this is dreadful, but that it was something that she should almost welcome.

and she describes it as a privilege. Let me read what she says. One word became unbelievably clear and that word was privileged.

He didn't take away pain or cruelty or humiliation. No, it was all there, but now it was altogether different.

[31 : 51] it was with him, for him, in him. He was actually offering me the inestimable privilege of sharing in some little way the edge of the fellowship of his suffering.

God never uses a person greatly until he has wounded them deeply. The privilege he offers you is greater than the price you have to pay.

The privilege is greater than the price. So when we face suffering in our lives, and I say we all do, and some of you I know suffer far, far more than I ever have, let's recognize that it is part of God's plan for us.

In a real sense, it is a privilege that he allows us to suffer. We are in some way reflecting the suffering that the Lord Jesus had.

And as we suffer, let us recognize God's hand in it. Let us recognize the sinfulness in our lives and put it aside. And let us grow to maturity and to be more like our Lord.

[33 : 08] Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for this passage which at first seems very difficult but yet can be very precious as we understand it.

That as a loving Father, you discipline your children, but you do it only for our good. That we may have more joy and peace in the Lord Jesus.

That we may mature in faith and become truly holy and righteous. That we may become truly like Jesus, may share something of his character and represent that to others.

And we pray that when we face times of suffering in our lives, that you will help us to see that under your hand we can endure the suffering. More than that, we can be drawn to the Lord Jesus through it and come to understand more the love that he had for us as he suffered.

Help us to be those who endure suffering with courage and with faith and with a real confidence in you. We thank you for the time we've had studying your word as now we come to remember the Lord Jesus in the way that he's appointed.

[34 : 29] Help us to understand a bit more of his suffering and to be drawn closer to him. We ask in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.