

Enduring God's Discipline with Joy

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Hebrews 12:3-11

Preached on: Sunday, July 28, 2013

I believe the Spirit of God would have me minister to you from his Word in Hebrews 12. So if you will take your Bibles and turn there, I want to speak to you this morning about the topic of Enduring God's Discipline with Joy. The text that we will be looking at begins in verse 3 but I want to get a running start so I'll begin in verse 1.

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

"You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, 'MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM. FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.' It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

Do you remember when you first came to Christ? Take your mind back there for a moment when you were absolutely overwhelmed by the love of God, fixated upon his grace and his mercy. Your eyes of faith were fixed on Jesus. Your heart was filled with excitement as you anticipated all that he had in store for you. Do you remember when you couldn't wait to tell others, you couldn't wait to share the Gospel? You took advantage of every opportunity to hear his Word taught. You loved his Word. You longed for the sincere milk of the Word. You cherished times of private worship. You couldn't get enough fellowship. You couldn't get enough discipleship. You loved to sing praises to his name. Do you remember those days? Hopefully they're still there but you may also recall that after a while you began to experience hardships in your life. You began to feel the inevitable struggles of life, perhaps you got frustrated, maybe you even

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began to get a little bit depressed because you found very quickly that not everybody wanted to hear about your Jesus. In fact, a lot of them, thought that you were just a fool.

And then you run across people that knew error better than you knew truth and you began to get maybe even more frustrated. And as you experienced the pain of rejection, which is always inevitable when we follow Christ in this fallen world, you began to fear man more than God. You wanted to do everything you could to somehow avoid the pain of being laughed at. And what was once a joyous fixation on Christ began to fade. You start getting preoccupied with other things, things in life that will be a little bit safer. You start looking for relief rather than blessing and little by little, you fall in love with things other than Christ. Then the difficulties of life distract you further and further and you become increasingly frustrated and guilty because you know you're not walking faithfully with Christ and in order to soothe your conscience, you'll keep coming to church, maybe even read your Bible some but, quite frankly, little by little you begin to leave your first love and the weight of the world begins to settle down on you.

Perhaps some of you are experiencing that today. Bottom line, we learn very early on in our Christian life that the cost of following Christ can be very high. It's really difficult for us to deny ourselves and take up a cross daily and follow him. The Christian life, we learn, is a marathon, it's not a sprint and it requires, therefore, conditioning, it requires training, it requires endurance. And right now, if you're honest, you will admit that you need a lot more training, you need a lot more conditioning to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength and to love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.

But aren't you thankful that you have a heavenly Father who is watching and who knows precisely what you need to learn. Moreover, he knows precisely how to teach you what you need to learn, how to train you. Like a great track coach, he knows your weaknesses and he knows exactly what is required to get you in the type of shape and to have the type of conditioning that will give you the endurance you need to run your race, to know that he loves you so perfectly, so faithfully that he will do whatever it takes to train you.

The question is: will you submit to that training? Because, my friends, many times the training is very hard. This is the key to spiritual maturity. In fact, as I meditated upon this, perhaps the greatest indicator of spiritual maturity is how a believer handles difficulties in his life. You want to ask yourself this morning: when great trials come upon me do I face them with joy or with despair? When great difficulties come upon me does it produce within me worship or whining? Does it produce within me praise or pouting?

I want you to understand this morning from this text the issue of how to endure God's disciplines with joy. You must understand the context here. Life was hard for the early Jewish believers to whom the Book of Hebrews was written. The initial euphoria of coming to Christ began to wane in light of persecution. They found such relief and

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forgiveness and grace in Christ that they were willing to reject the onerous, burdensome law-keeping of Judaism; they were willing to turn their back on all of the ceremonies and traditions in order to follow Christ. And as a result of that, many of them lost their families, they were disowned. Spouses no longer wanted anything to do with them. Children didn't want anything to do with a mother or a father or parents with their child. Friends began to shun them. They were no longer welcomed in the synagogue, the very heart of their worship and social being. Many of them lost their jobs. People wouldn't buy their goods and services. Many had their property seized. For many of them, coming to Christ meant that you were going to be homeless. Some were even imprisoned. They became the objects of constant ridicule and abuse because of their new-found faith in Christ.

And even unbelieving Jews who had pity on them and tried to help them, were also persecuted. The writer of Hebrews tells us about this in chapter 10, beginning in verse 32 where he reminded the readers of "the former days when after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated." And on top of this, they experienced the same types of things that we all experience and that's the inevitable struggles of life: sickness, disease, accidents, death.

And what started off with such joy and excitement, gradually turned into a dark storm of unimaginable difficulty and in light of such sufferings, some of them became discouraged. Some of them began to falter in their faith. They looked for ways to compromise. They looked for relief. They wanted to take a breather from the marathon that had just gotten started for them because they were being asked to endure something that was so difficult. So, they began to take their eyes off of Christ.

They took their eyes off of the glorious finish line of their race and instead, they began to focus on the temporary sorrows of life, some of which were very painful. For this reason, the writer of Hebrews encourages them in verse 1, to "lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith." And, friends, unless we learn to do this, even as they had to learn to do this, we will lose our stride in the race, we will stumble and we will fall and we will succumb to the hardships and the challenges of life and we will collapse in defeat. Some of their friends had already done that and others were thinking about it so these saints, like us, needed to learn how to endure God's discipline in life. How to submit, shall we say, to the coach's training.

Here, the Holy Spirit encourages all of us. In fact, the primary purpose of this epistle is to strengthen the resolve of the saints so that they would be able to endure just the inevitable difficulties of life in a fallen world. Especially, the sorrows of persecution. In chapter 12:12, we read that the purpose here is to "strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame

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may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed." In chapter 13:22, he says, "I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation." And I urge you in the same way.

So, we want to ask ourselves this morning: how do I face trials in my life? And I know some of you are there right now. Do you endure or do you falter? Moreover, how do you perceive God in face of your trials? Are you seeing him as one who is engaged or one who is disengaged and really doesn't care? Maybe you see him as one who is angry with you, time to make you pay. How do you relate to him in the midst of suffering? Are you bitter? Are you indifferent? Do you grow weary and lose heart? Do you find yourself demanding some answer from God? Asking him, "Why? God, why do the wicked continue to prosper? Why do I seem to be losing every battle? What have I done to deserve all of this? God, where are you in all of this? Why do I feel so abandoned and discouraged?"

In chapter 11, we are reminded of some of the Old Testament saints who also suffered for their faith. In fact, in verses 34-38 we learn of some of the things that God called upon them to endure and this, by the way, provides a background for chapter 12. Those early saints, we are told, had to endure the horrors of war, torture, mockings and scourgings, chains, imprisonment. Some were stoned, sawed in two, tempted, put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins, goatskins, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. In fact, some of our dear friends in South Sudan, where two of our missionaries are, are still experiencing that with their people.

So we want to keep this in perspective and yet, those dear saints described in Hebrews 11 went through their entire life without ever experiencing the fullness of the promises that God had given them with respect to the New Covenant. You realize, they never experienced the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. They never experienced the profound awareness of sins forgiven. They never experienced the unimaginable joys of the Messianic Kingdom that they were longing for, that we're longing for. Yet, despite all of this, they endured with great faith. They never lost hope. They never succumbed to discouragement and defeat because they never lost sight of their Lord. Those great saints of old served as an example to the first century New Testament saints. And so, again, their faithfulness provides the necessary backdrop for the exhortations that are given here in chapter 12.

In verses 3 through 11 that I want to look at this morning, the Holy Spirit reveals some amazing truths to us that I find are very, very helpful in putting all of this together, giving us a proper perspective. And when we learn these truths, we will not only endure the great difficulties that God has ordained to allow to enter into our life, but we will actually welcome them with joy knowing that they will ultimately produce in us and for us, things that are amazing beyond our comprehension.

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I wish to draw your attention this morning to three categories that emerge from the text. First, we are going to look at the rebuke for fainthearted endurance; secondly, we're going to look at reasons for bold endurance; and finally, rewards for steadfast endurance. So let's examine these profound truths together and learn more about what our heavenly Father is up to in our lives.

First of all, notice the rebuke for fainthearted endurance beginning in verse 3. He says, "For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Obviously, Christ is to be our supreme example and, according to verse 2, we are to keep our eyes "fixed upon him, the author," in other words, the originator, the pioneer, the initiator, the pre-eminent example of our faith. Then he says, "and perfecter of faith," in other words, the one who will perfect and complete our faith, having been the perfect and complete example of the life of faith.

Beloved, when life is tough and I know for some of you it is really tough right now, you simply must learn this most fundamental lesson. You have got to keep your eyes fixed upon Christ as your example, the one who suffered in ways that you cannot imagine, on your behalf. Again, we understand here that faith is likened to a race and so you don't want to get distracted by wicked people around you that might be causing you pain. You don't want to get distracted by the things in life that cause you sorrow, as difficult as they may be. Instead, what you must do is decisively commit yourself to be a student of Christ. You must study Christ. You must listen to him as he reveals himself to you in his Word. You must meditate upon him. You must concentrate upon him. You must commune with him. You must be willing to be a holy and living sacrifice unto him. Seek to please him in all that you do and if you do this, you will finish the race well and he will empower you with all the endurance that you need to run effectively. This is the key: endurance comes from him, not you.

And here is the promise: so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. By the way, that was ancient sports lingo used to describe a runner that would become so fatigued that he would collapse. God doesn't want that to happen to us and so he has provided a way to prevent that from happening.

So, if you are struggling here this morning, here's how you can gain new strength; here's how you can persevere and keep going with joy. He says, "consider Him." Folks, we need to repeat that phrase often: consider him. Not yourself, not your situation, not others that might be dominating your attention in the midst of whatever trial you're struggling with but, instead, you consider him. If you think about all of the other things you will find yourself being weakened in your faith. You will lose your stride. If you watch runners, you will see that they are absolutely fixated on their race; they're not looking around waving at people; they're not turning around and looking at people behind them. They are looking for the finish line and that's how we have to be otherwise we will succumb to fatigue and give up.

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Think about it: Jesus kept his stride all the way to the cross, didn't he? Why? According to verse 2, "for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Beloved, bear in mind that joy comes in the morning and even as morning follows night, joy and relief and blessing is coming. So we can sing in the midst of tribulation and rejoice when we find ourselves in some fiery furnace of affliction because God is in it, God is in there with us, he is for us and he is going to refine us and he will give us the strength to continue on and exalt us at the proper time.

The rebuke continues in verse 4, "You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin." In other words, what he's saying here is, "Yes, brothers and sisters, life is tough but it could be far worse. None of you are experiencing martyrdom here." By the way, at this stage in history, while persecution was difficult, Christian martyrdom did not exist under Emperor Claudius. But also think about it, it's as if he's saying, "Look, none of you have lived a sinless life like Christ did and yet he was willing to bear your sins and mine in his body on the cross, taking the punishment that we deserved."

Having said that, persecution was on its way, even martyrdom. It has existed down through history. In fact, I know that a number of people who listen to this pulpit every week are facing that threat. And to those of you who are listening to my voice that are in that kind of a situation, I give you encouragement here. As we understand these great truths, we can see that God is using them for great blessing in your life and for his glory.

But for the majority of us, even though we're not facing that kind of persecution, we do experience other types of suffering, other types of great difficulties, especially terminal illness. However, regardless the severity of the circumstance, we've got to guard our thinking and it's interesting what the writer does here. The Spirit of God helps us to be careful here not to forget three very important realities. I want you to look at the first one in verse 5. He says, "you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons." That's where I want to begin. Notice how the figure shifts from running a race to being a son in a family. Namely, we are adopted sons of the living God. He is our heavenly Father. I mean, folks, this is absolutely mind-boggling. Those of you that are struggling, remember this, remember to whom you belong, the one who has birthed you physically and spiritually.

That's why Paul said in Romans 8, beginning in verse 15, "you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him." So, friends, when life is hard you simply must not lose sight of the fact that you are a son of your heavenly Father.

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And what are the exhortations addressed to us as sons? Again, back to verse 5, he says, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by him." Here he's quoting Proverbs 3:11-12. I want you to notice the second aspect of this exhortation here. Not only are we sons but he takes us to Proverbs here and reminds them that they are not to regard lightly the discipline of the Lord. First, we must understand the concept of discipline. The Greek verb and the noun translated "discipline" has a broad range of meaning. It would include things like: upbringing; it could be translated "training, correction, instruction"; sometimes it's even used to describe punishment. But it's a broad term that pertains to everything that is involved in training up a child to help him develop into a mature adult. And, of course, here the context speaks of spiritual adulthood, spiritual training so that we can become mature and be more like Christ.

It's also important for you to understand that while the concept of punishment is no doubt included, that is not the emphasis here. We must not equate suffering with divine punishment of sin, after all, Christ paid the penalty for our sins on the cross and so now there is no more condemnation. So, here the writer is exhorting the readers to endure all the trials in life knowing that their loving heavenly Father has ordained to allow them to come into their life so that he might train them; that he might educate them; that he might instruct his children. Sometimes he may bring persecution into a believer's life. Sometimes it's other forms of suffering to correct, perhaps, wrong attitudes, wrong beliefs. To teach us some important truth that he knows we need to understand because of what we're going to be facing in the future that we may not even know about. He will even use sickness and sorrow to curb our passions and animate our hearts and our will towards Christ-like virtues.

But by quoting Proverbs 3, he's saying, in essence, "Folks, you have forgotten the lessons of Proverbs." There is a great lesson here. Lessons pertaining to grace and the righteousness of God and faith alone in the Messiah, your faithful High Priest. Lessons that will help you not to faint or compromise because some of them were wanting to do that. It would be a whole lot easier to go ahead and kind of ease back in to all of the traditions and the ceremonies and the law-keeping to get people off your back. He's saying, in essence, don't return once again to those Temple sacrifices, to the keeping of the law in order to escape persecution.

But even for us today, the message is the same: don't take your eyes off of Jesus, the author, the perfecter of your faith; don't lose sight of your sonship; don't lose sight of your inheritance, your power to endure through Christ who strengthens you, through whom you can do all things; don't get distracted with the pain and the suffering and lose sight of the promise. And he says here specifically: don't take lightly the discipline, in other words, the training, the correction, the education of the Lord.

Now, the question is: how would we do that? What does that mean to take lightly? He's saying, "Don't take lightly the discipline of the Lord." The answer is this, friends: we

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take lightly the discipline of the Lord when we fail to realize that it is God that has ordained to allow the affliction that we are experiencing for our good and his glory. When you lose sight of that, you're in a world of confusion. Then, of course, that's what a loving father is going to do.

You must understand, he is not saying here, "Don't take your problems lightly." We always take our problems very seriously, in fact, we tend to give them far more power than they deserve. That's not what he's saying. He's saying rather, "Don't take lightly the fact that God is using them to train you, to mature you, to make you more like Christ." Otherwise, your Christian life will remain in a perpetual state of spiritual infancy and powerlessness. Think of some great difficulty you're experiencing in your life right now. What do you suppose God is trying to teach you? Or have you even thought about that? If the answer is, "You know, I've never really thought about that," then you are taking it way too lightly, you're regarding it lightly. Don't do that.

He's also saying thirdly, this third component in this exhortation, he says, "nor faint when are you reproved by him." This is another side of that coin. On the one hand you could regard something lightly, never give any thought as to what God is up to, what the Father is trying to do to train his son or you can faint, which means to just give up, just collapse, just throw-in-the-towel. You grow weary, you lose heart, you become depressed, you get sour, you get sullen, you start anesthetizing the pain of your life with whatever you can get your hands on, everything from chemicals to those little buttons that we keep in our hand in front of a screen. And whatever we use to take our minds off of these things will always include something that dishonors Christ, causes us to focus on something other than God and his eternal purposes in our life.

The Psalmist corrected this when it began to happen to him. In Psalm 42:6 he cried out, "O my God, my soul is in despair within me," and then, I love it, he says this, "Therefore I remember thee," that's where your mind has to go. In verse 11 of Psalm 42, he says, "Why are you in despair, O my soul?" Folks, that's how we have to talk to ourselves. "What's going on here? Why am I in despair, O my soul?" "And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God."

You know, folks, oftentimes we find ourselves in a season of great loneliness and despair and our faith is tried and tested in ways that we've never experienced. And yet, what we must keep in mind is that the seal of our faith is always hardened in the fires of adversity. And it is the Lord, our loving Father, that puts us there and that heats up the fire and preserves us in it. Then all of the impurities of sin and ignorance gets burned away. How exciting to look at life's difficulties and rejoice knowing that my Father is up to something in my life. He's training me with all of this. He's helping me develop into a son that will resemble his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Folks, this is why when we find ourselves in great difficulties we must learn to ask what not why. You know, it's easy to ask why, isn't it? "Lord, why? Why me? Why is this happening to me?" As if he owes you an explanation. As if you could understand it if he gave it to you. Rather than that, what we must say is, "What? Lord, what do you want me to do given what have rained into my life that will bring glory to you? Lord, it's painful right now. I'm struggling. I'm crying out to you for help and certainly I plead for relief. But, Lord, above all I want to know what I need to learn here, what I need to do here that will bring you glory because with that kind of a mindset, I know that you will sustain me in the midst of this great difficulty in my life. And ultimately I will be purified even more and that's what I long for. Therefore, Father, thank you for this great difficulty because I know it is from you and I know that this is precisely, exactly what I need in my life right now even though it is ripping my guts out." That's the attitude we are to have.

Remember Job? He couldn't understand what was going on and finally he got to a point where he said, "You know, God, I think we need to have a talk. I want an audience with you because obviously you've missed something here. I mean, do I deserve all of this?" See, he asked why not what. Of course, you know the story: God goes through chapter after chapter after chapter just absolutely blowing him out of the water with who he is and with all of his glory. What an amazing passage of Scripture.

And what happened to Job? It's interesting. He says at the end of chapter 42, he says, "I have declared that which I did not understand things too wonderful for me which I did not know." He went on to say, "I have heard thee by the hearing of the ear but now my eyes see thee. Therefore, I retract and I repent in dust and ashes." It's amazing. His circumstances did not change but, boy, his perspective did. And his joy was restored. And eventually the morning came and he was blessed.

But isn't it interesting that God never gave him an explanation. He didn't say, "Job, I know you're going to find this hard to believe but, you know, there's this deal that's going on with Satan here and I'm trying to prove something here." He didn't owe him that explanation and once again, as I always say, even if God would've given it to him, Job wouldn't have been able to understand it any more than you can understand what's going on in your life.

Friends, sometimes the great difficulties in your life not only are they used to train you but other people are watching and he will use them to train them. So just know that we serve an omniscient, omnipotent God that is so far beyond anything that we could imagine that what we need to do is just shut up and rejoice and go through the training and watch what he will do.

I'm reminded of Romans 5:3. There, Paul says, that we "exalt in our tribulations." Exalt means you rejoice, you find glory on account of a thing. Our faith literally triumphs in tribulations. That term can be translated "anguish" or "afflictions." So, in other words, what we experience when some great difficulty comes into our life and just exerts this

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enormous pressure on us and we feel like we can't survive and what's he saying? You want to exalt in that. It's interesting there, he doesn't say that you need to rejoice in spite of your tribulation. In other words, just resign yourself to it and have a stiff upper lip and tough it out. He's not even there saying that you need to rejoice in the midst of your tribulations even though that is also true, he is literally saying that you need to rejoice because of your tribulation, on account of it. Why? Because your heavenly Father is up to something; he is training you so that you can enjoy more of the blessings that he longs to give to you.

So he says, "exalt in your tribulations knowing," I love that, knowing. In other words, this joy in tribulation results in knowledge. You have to have intentional discernment. Knowing what? He says that tribulation brings about. In other words, it's going to perform something good in us. It brings about perseverance, proven character, proven character hope and so forth.

In Philippians 1:29 you read something very similar. There, Paul says, "For to you it has been granted." By the way, that's a Greek verb that comes from the noun for "grace," or it means "a gracious gift." "For to you it has been granted." There's this gracious gift. "For Christ's sake not only to believe in him but also to," what? "To suffer for his sake."

Back to Hebrews 12. You're a son of the most high God, he is your heavenly Father. When difficulties come, don't regard them as if he's not up to something and don't faint and give up. So, that's the rebuke for fainthearted endurance.

Secondly, notice he says in verse 6, "For those whom the Lord loves he disciplines." Here we begin to understand reasons for bold endurance. This is such an astounding truth that few Christians understand: that suffering actually proves the Father's love for his own. And, Oh, what favored sons we are. You see, this is part of that process of sanctification and, therefore, a comfort when reason fails to comprehend the grievous nature of some affliction that is pressing upon our soul, that has pounced upon us like some ferocious beast. I mean, who can understand the benefit of losing a wife? Who can understand the advantage of a terminal illness? Who can grasp the profit of persecution? Who can recognize the value of the innocent being imprisoned? You see, only faith, not reason, can triumph over adversity. Indeed, the secret things belong to the Lord, don't they? Only faith in a loving Father who is continually working within us can cause a beleaguered soul to cry out like the Psalmist did in Psalm 101:1, "I will sing of lovingkindness and justice to you, O Lord. I will sing praises." My friends, this is the first place your mind needs to go when you are suffering some great difficulty. My Father loves me and, therefore, I will commit myself to learning what he has in store for me in the midst of this trial.

But notice he also says that he "scourges every son whom he receives." This speaks of the severity of God's discipline in our lives when we disobey with impunity, when we have no fear of God. I mean, folks, let's face it, there are times when we are naughty and

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there are times when we are outright belligerent and defiant but because of our Father's great love for us, he will not allow us to go without the appropriate punishment and correction. "He scourges every son whom he receives." In other words, his sons through faith, he has received us.

We all know what happens when a child is not disciplined. All we have to do is look at the chaos, for example, in most of our public school systems, especially in inner cities. Proverbs 31:24, we read, "He who spares his rod hates his son. But he who loves him disciplines him diligently." Proverbs 29:15, "The rod and reproof give wisdom but a child who gets him own way brings his mother to shame." Now, we must understand that God's discipline in our lives never involves any wrath. There is no condemnation, once again. His punishment is always corrective. It is never judgmental. It's always loving correction.

He goes on to say in verse 7, "It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons." Folks, we should marvel at this. God disciplines us because he loves us and though the Father chastens us whenever we need it, we must remember that he hates the rod as much as we do. I remember what it was like with my little children and even now with my grandchildren, sometimes rather forceful discipline is required. And I know what it means in my heart to say, "Son, this is going to hurt me worse than it will hurt you." That's how the Lord is with us.

Lamentations 3:31, "For the Lord will not reject forever for he causes grief then he will have compassion according to his abundant lovingkindness for he does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of men." Isn't it interesting. The Lord only uses discipline for the reason that we should be willing and grateful to receive it. Namely, our eternal good. And in his discipline, he never gives us more than we can bear. He will never allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to endure, 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Then as morning follows night, the light of hope begins to conquer the darkness of gloom even before the dawn of grace arises and faith becomes sight. And what a comfort it is to know that the Father's continual discipline in our life does such a work. He brings good out of evil; he brings joy out of sorrow.

Thirdly, and finally, we see the rewards for steadfast endurance. Notice, verse 9, he says, "Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them." By the way, all children understand that fair discipline is a sign that their parent truly loves them and is engaged in their life; that their parent has their best interest at heart. The writer goes on to say, "shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?" And here the Spirit reveals the first of two rewards for steadfast endurance. The first one is life. Now, this might possibly be a reference to the abundant life, the spiritual blessing

Enduring God's Discipline with Joy

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Hebrews 12:3-11

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which is the fruit of spiritual maturity but I think it also includes physical life because we know that rebellious, unrepentant believers risk losing their life.

It's interesting. If you go back to Deuteronomy 21:18 and following, we learn that under the Old Covenant, a stubborn and rebellious son, a glutton and a drunkard who refuse to obey the father or the mother and when chastised refuse to learn from them, would be brought to the elders to be judged and then if found guilty, according to verse 21, "all of the men of his city shall stone him to death so you shall remove the evil from your midst and all Israel will hear of it and fear."

Folks, God is serious about children obeying parents but he's also serious about us obeying him. You will recall in 1 Corinthians 11:30, Paul describes believers that God will put to death because of their cavalier attitude towards sin and making a mockery of the Lord's table. In 1 John 5:16, we read of a sin leading to death. By the way, that's not speaking of one particular sin but the final sin in a host of high-handed, deliberate sins that finally exceeds the limits of God's tolerance. James implies the same thing in James 1:21.

Beloved, God is serious about the purity of his church and he will use the discipline of physical death to preserve that purity, therefore, life is a reward for steadfast endurance. But there's a second reward and that is the reward of holiness. Notice, verse 10, "For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness." This is amazing, isn't it? The more discipline we endure with joyful submission, the more we are separated from the ravages of sin that plague us and bring such misery and pain and sorrow into our life.

The ultimate experience of this joy is going to come when we are finally and fully conformed into the image of Christ and so he gives this closing summary statement in verse 11, "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." The word "trained" comes from the Greek *gymnazo*; we get our word "gymnasium" from it. And, again, the idea here is that we must submit to the training or it will do us no good. We must strengthen our spiritual muscles so that we can subdue the flesh and do battle effectively with the enemy of our souls.

But to be sure, when we're in the midst of the training, the pain can somehow eclipse the reality of what the Father is up to and that's why he says here, "so it seems not to be joyful but sorrowful." Ah but dear Christians, think about it. Not everything is what it seems to be. The earth is rotating around its axis right now at over 1,000 mph. It doesn't seem to be. The earth is moving around the sun at 67,000 mph. It sure doesn't seem that way to me. I mean, my hair's not blowing or anything. It just doesn't seem that way. It seems like the sun is larger when it sets than when it's in its zenith. It seems as though the moon somehow emits light but, in fact, it reflects it.

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Beloved, likewise, trials seem to be sorrowful yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. This is why James tells us to "consider it all joy brethren when you encounter various trials." In other words, by the power of the Spirit we, once again, must set our mind on the outcome of what the Lord is up to. We've got to consciously, deliberately commit ourselves to the exercise here; to being trained by whatever the Father is up to in our life.

But the Father's discipline isn't always what it seems to be, but please hear me: it is what it is intended to be and it is intended to be a supernatural act of love that will bring immeasurable blessing and joy to every child who is willing to be trained by it. That's why he says in closing, "Afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." Friends, fruit never comes instantaneously, right? It takes a while to develop, to ripen, but it does come over time.

And what a marvelous harvest of peace and righteousness we have. Think about it. Peace in a warring world. Peace amidst all of the conflict. Peace that brings restoration. Peace that brings healing to wounded hearts. That brings understanding of the things that have brought so much confusion. Then, righteousness. Righteousness that will flourish on the vine of a life that has been willing to submit to the Father's training. Righteousness that will be obvious for everyone to see and to taste. An unmistakable righteousness that will be the spectacle of the world. What a taste of heaven we can have when we endure with joy. The kind of peace that we will experience during the Messianic reign. Isaiah says in chapter 32:17, "And the work of righteousness will be peace and the service of righteousness quietness and confidence forever. Then my people will live in a peaceful habitation."

Beloved, learn to endure trials with great joy. This is how you do it. And it's my prayer that those of you who are struggling with an aching heart will find relief and will find satisfaction in Christ. And for those of you who know nothing of Christ, I would plead with you today to humble yourself before him because one day you will be forced to; you will bow, you will confess him as Lord and then you will hear the dreadful sentence, "Depart from me you cursed one." But I would plead with you to come to Christ today. To believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ. To trust your soul to him and he will save you. He will give you eternal life and he will sustain you in the midst of the trials that he will put you through in order to accomplish all that he wants to accomplish in you; to conform you into the precious and blessed image of his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. And we will experience with him and in his presence, joy forevermore. Morning is coming. Amen.

Let's pray.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths. May they bear much fruit in our lives, I pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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