

The Discipline of Suffering
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Hebrews 12:1-13

Let's take a poll. How many were rarely disciplined as a kid? How many DID get some discipline at least now and then? Any regular offenders? Anyone willing to share the most memorable thing you were ever disciplined for?

Here's the big idea: In life there's pain. In the life of a follower of Jesus, there is no such thing as RANDOM PAIN. God uses the pain in our lives to grow us to maturity as Christians.

In Hebrews chapter eleven, the writer gave his readers (and us) a "hall of faith," the stories of Old Testament people who lived "by faith," thus they pleased God, were "commended," and blessed by Him. So, in the first two verses of chapter twelve, the writer draws a conclusion from what we've read in chapter eleven:

Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Question: Based on verse one, what is our goal? In Greek literature "cloud" meant a collection of people...think "crowd." Why would this cloud of saints be an encouragement to us? What holds us back in running the Christian race? What is the difference between a weight and a sin that slow us down in running the race?

The "hall of faith" from chapter eleven, and every saint since then, are all examples to encourage us we CAN run the race of the Christian life with endurance. To do that we need to cast off anything that slows us down, wraps itself around our feet, and trips us up. As encouraging as their example is, we need special focus and motivation. We need a supernatural leader and coach. Verse two:

2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

- Let's study some key words in that verse to be sure we get the meaning:
- "Looking" to Jesus means to "consider attentively;" "fixing our gaze by looking away from all else."
- Jesus is the "founder" or "author" of our faith. The word also translates: "leader" and "captain."

- Jesus is more importantly the “finisher” or “perfecter” of our faith. This word also means: “to bring fruit to perfection, hence to bear perfect offspring.”

Thomas, R. L. (1998). New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries

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When we look to Jesus, what does He do for us, to help us run the race? Though He is the ultimate example of enduring hardship, why is Jesus more than just an example? Based on the last part of verse two, why is Jesus the ONLY one we should look to?

- Generally, most of us know these first two verses of Hebrews chapter twelve and not much else about the chapter. We tend to read verses one and two:
12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
- Then we think, *“That is encouraging!” “That is motivating!” “That’s a good place to say ‘amen,’ sing the doxology and go home!”*
- But there’s more to Hebrews chapter twelve than just verses one and two. Since we’re now in the family, there’s more to learn from Jesus’ example about endurance in Christian life.
- Let’s read verses three and four:

Hebrews 12:3–4 (ESV)

3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

- Verse three: **What are we considering about Jesus? Why does the writer want us to consider this? Jesus not only bore physical suffering and ridicule from people. What other horrible experience did He endure on the cross?**
- Okay, this makes sense. I should always be aware of the price Jesus paid and the shame and abuse He bore for me. That’s also encouraging.
- But, wait, we’re not done yet. As adopted sons and daughters of God, we don’t just share in Jesus’ righteousness.
- Romans 8:17 says if we are...”children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. “
- In verses five and six, the writer quotes from Proverbs 3:11-12:

Hebrews 12:5–6 (ESV)

5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.

6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,

and chastises every son whom he receives.”

- **According to verse six, why would discipline be natural and expected?**
- Verses seven and eight explain further.

7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

- Verses seven and eight: If God never disciplines us, **what does that call into question?**

A thought: If we can disobey God continually without thinking twice; we should question if we were ever saved once.

9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

- If your earthly parents who were imperfect disciplined you and later you respected them for it, we should expect nothing less from our perfect Heavenly Father.
- Some of you may have had harsh or abusive parents. This example may be difficult to embrace. However, all of us understand instinctively, that without correction we would never grow and develop into the people God created us to be.
- **Why would God lovingly, though painfully, administer discipline to us sometimes?**
- **What’s the difference between God’s discipline and his allowing trials in our lives?**
- As a child of God, we should expect discipline when we are disobedient to our Heavenly Father. Sometimes we experience trials though we have done nothing wrong. Sometimes we suffer because we did the right thing, — persecution. Likely what the original readers faced.
- **What are some INCORRECT ways we might respond to God’s discipline or trials He allows? How should a Christian respond to God’s correction or the trials He allows?**
- **When we find ourselves going through a trial, what question do we tend to ask God?**
- Better questions are WHAT and HOW. *“What are you teaching me Lord? What do I need to confess and change?” “How are you strengthening my faith and endurance through this?”*
- Ever know a Christian who refused to submit to God’s correction? **What is their life like?**

11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

- The “bumper sticker” commentary on verse eleven is something you hear around the gym.
- “No pain, no gain.” God uses the pain in our lives to produce the “peaceful fruit of righteousness.” When you see a Christian who seems to be so serene no matter what comes their way, I’d almost guarantee they’ve ENDURED some big pain. They submitted to God’s training and grew in their Christian maturity.

George Guthrie writes:

God uses the difficulties we encounter as an aspect of training and moral development. They really are a gift that we might be all that he wants us to be. It does not take much reflection for us to recognize that much of our progress as persons comes through challenging or even painful experiences, whether they be in the realm of athletics, relationships, or other areas of skill development. So our author’s point is that God can redeem the pain we experience in life, using it for our good. (NIV Application Commentary)

Listen to the words of three great Christian voices on this subject of pain and suffering:

Oswald Chambers wrote in, *My Utmost For His Highest*:

Sorrow is one of the biggest facts in life; it is no use saying sorrow ought not to be. Sin and sorrow and suffering are, and it is not for us to say that God has made a mistake in allowing them.

C. S. Lewis in the *Problem of Pain* wrote:

“God whispers to us in our pleasure, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

Thomas à Kempis, wrote:

The better you prepare yourself to meet suffering, the more wisely will you act, and the greater will be your merit. You are not truly patient if you will only endure what you think fit, and only from those whom you like. A truly patient man does not consider by whom he is tried, whether by his superior, his equal, or his inferior; whether by a good and holy man, or by a perverse and wicked person. But however great or frequent the trial that besets him, and by whatever agency it comes, he accepts it gladly as from the hand of God, and counts it all gain.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- If you know you’re a child of God and you’re going through some pain, it doesn’t mean God has abandoned you, it means he’s GROWING you. It proves you’re His child.
- Don’t RESIST. Instead SUBMIT. Ask Him, “*Lord, what are you teaching me?*”
- Some pain is to teach us endurance; some pain is persecution for doing God’s will.
- Sometimes pain is the result of disobedience. If someone continually disobeys God and His word with no consequences, maybe their relationship with Jesus isn’t what they think it is.
- Regardless of the source of our pain, it should draw us closer to God.
- Once the painful lesson is past, verses twelve and thirteen tell us what to do:

Hebrews 12:12–13 (NLT)

12 So take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees. 13 Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong.

Get up. Dry your tears. Be thankful you have a Father who loves you enough to use the pain in your life to produce fruit in your life. Then get back in the race!