

Heavenly Discipline Hebrews 12:3-11

Hebrews 12:3-11 Introduction

- The original readers of this sermon would have been very familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures – our Old Testament.
- The passage we will study today is based on a passage from the book of Proverbs.
- Proverbs is a book written with the goal of making us wise.
- Let's begin by reading Proverbs 3:1-12.

- As we reflect upon these words written from a father to a son, our rabbi will encourage us to consider them in light of our child-to-father relationship with the Lord.
- If a son can learn important things from an earthly father's instruction, we can certainly learn so much more by submitting the perfectly loving and totally wise correction of our heavenly Father.

- And as we'll see in this passage, some of our Father's instruction comes in the form of discipline or chastisement.
- We will be wise to submit to this correction, because the goal of it is to make us holy – just as our Father in heaven is holy.

If we willingly submit to the discipline of our heavenly Father, in the end we will share in His holiness.

- Let's read Hebrews 12:3-11.

Hebrews 12:3-11 Outline

- I. Consider the sufferings of Jesus. 12:3-4
- II. Remember that God treats us as sons. 12:5-8
- III. Trust that God knows what He's doing. 12:9-11

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Consider the sufferings of Jesus. 12:3-4

- If you have difficulty believing that suffering can have a purpose, just look at Jesus.
- He didn't save us by thrashing the devil like a superhero thumping a villain.
- He saved us through His suffering and death.
- He willingly endured the cross.
- His resurrection was the ultimate victory, but it was His death that paid the price for our sins and made resurrection possible.

- The hostility that Jesus endured from sinners was part of the Father's plan.
- We have yet to suffer that much.
- In fact, the spiritual anguish that He endured by taking our sins upon Himself ensures that we will never have to suffer as He did.
- That means we can endure whatever comes our way by continually looking to Him.

- The original readers of this written sermon might soon be the victims of persecution themselves.

- The rabbi understands that the circumstances of his readers – and our own – may be authentically difficult. He gets that.
- We always need, however, to keep our sufferings in perspective.
- Others have already suffered more than we have.
- Jesus suffered more than we ever will.
- Others have already suffered more than we have.
- Jesus suffered more than we ever will.
- Q: How can we face our trials and sufferings with enough courage to give God glory?
- A: By considering the sufferings of Jesus.

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Remember that God treats us as sons. 12:5-8

A brief note on the Bible and gender-neutral language:

- Sometimes the Bible uses gender-neutral language in the original (“human” or “humans”) where our English Bibles have traditionally used the words “man” or “men.”
- In such cases, when it is more faithful to the original we should be OK with more gender-neutral terms.
- In other cases, such as this passage, the Bible actually uses a gendered term: “sons”.
- We should be OK with that too.
- And we should be OK with Christ having the church as a “bride” and men being a part of it.
- And so on. We should be OK with the original readings, whatever they are.
- Further, the Bible does tend to advocate clearly defined gender roles in some cases – such as husbands and wives and so on.
- But it never implies that men and women are anything but equal before God – equally loved and equally accountable for the way we live.
- 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.”*

- 12:5-6 This quotation is a gentle rebuke from the rabbi to his hearers.
- He quotes from a Greek translation (LXX) of Proverbs 3:11-12 – the Old Testament text we read earlier.
- The rest of today’s passage will be a divinely inspired exposition of those verses.
- 12:6 scourge = to whip
- This is “divine chastisement” in the truest sense of that term.
- God is apparently a rather old fashioned Father in this sense.
- He believes corporal punishment is needed from time to time.
- Perhaps we do occasionally need it?

- 12:6 Be careful not to assume that all suffering is somehow to be construed as punishment for our sins.
- We should, however, allow for that corrective or chastening possibility.
- Spiritually motivated “whippings” are one essential form of child-training that God employs on us.
- Remember that God treats us as sons. 12:5-8
- 12:6 In another Old Testament example, Job did not suffer for any wrongdoing on his part. His suffering was not a “whipping” in any sense.
- But it was misunderstood to be so by his friends.
- Still, one of his friends, a man named Eliphaz, said something very sensible.
 - See Job 5:17.

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Trust that God knows what He’s doing. 12:9-11

- 12:9 Q: What is the proper response to God’s discipline?
- A: We should “readily be in subjection” to it.
- That means we should willingly submit to the discipline that He brings into our lives.
- We should willingly endure it, knowing He intends it for our good.

- 12:10 Q: What is the goal of God’s discipline?
- A: Our holiness.
- We may mistakenly believe that God’s only goal is to make us happy in this life.
- This is not actually true.
- He desires us to share in His holy character.
- He wants us to be more like Him.

- 12:10 This will no doubt make us permanently and extremely happy – but that’s in the long run.
- The problem is that we begin our journey at a significant distance from God.
- It is through His discipline, chastisement and training that He makes us more like Himself.

- 12:10 We may also mistakenly feel that God is somehow sadistically torturing us.
- We wonder why the trials or difficulties never seem to let up.
- The reality is that He desires our maximum profit – a character as much like His own as we are willing to allow Him to make us.

- 12:10 Further, earthly fathers train their children in order to build their character.
- They do their best, but even the best earthly father will fall far short of the ideal dad.
- Moreover, we grow up and outgrow the need for them to train us in that way.

- 12:10 God’s fatherly discipline is better than that of an earthly father in two ways:
 - He really does know what’s best – so that we can always trust Him completely.
 - We never outgrow His fatherly concern for us. We will always be in need of His training and He will always be there to teach.
- As we mature in our faith, His lessons become deeper and more profound.

- 12:11 Chastening – or discipline – never seems joyful at the time.
- Let's face it: It hurts and we don't like pain.
- But a painful lesson may be exactly what we need from Him.
- He is always looking far ahead into our future.
- Again, God's final goal is not to hurt us, but to bring about His absolutely perfect will.

- Consider this story once told by D.L. Moody:
 - A prominent, wealthy couple experienced the death of their only child.
 - Needless to say, these parents were seriously grieved.
 - Shortly thereafter, they took a trip to the Holy Land, where they witnessed a shepherd taking his sheep across a stream.

 - The water was rushing along briskly and some of the sheep were stuck at the water's edge, too frightened to cross.
 - Wisely, the shepherd went back to the other side and picked up a little lamb and personally carried it the full distance across the stream.
 - The bleating ewe watched her young lamb being carried away and immediately lost all fear of the rushing water.

 - She entered the water, no longer afraid, concerned only that she make it to the other side to be with her treasured lamb.
 - Soon other sheep got up the courage to follow her and before long the whole flock made it to the other side.

 - The couple who witnessed this immediately learned a valuable lesson.
 - They now realized what God had been doing in their lives.
 - Prior to that they had given very little thought to heaven and remained tragically unaware of God's gentler dealings with them.

 - They suddenly saw the severe lesson that they were only now capable of learning.
 - The Good Shepherd had taken their lamb before them, giving them courage to follow.
 - They returned home to spend the rest of their lives focused on heaven rather than on earth.
 - These parents learned to willingly submit to the discipline of the Lord.

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Hebrews 12:3-11 Conclusions

- Jesus endured hostility from sinners. We may have to as well.
- The correction God gives us is always the correction we need.
- We should not take it lightly since anything the Lord brings into our lives is important.
- We should not allow it to overwhelm us, as He will not allow us to be tested beyond what we are able to bear. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

- We should take all of our trials and sufferings as signs of God's fatherly love.
- Suffering can bring us into deeper experiences with God that prosperity and comfort will never allow.

- Submission to God leads to life (12:9). Our first earthly parents refused to submit to God and brought death to themselves and their children. With His help, we can do otherwise.
- God's correction is designed to produce holiness in us that we don't yet have. (12:10)
- God's correction is designed to bring about the peaceable fruit of righteousness – and fruitfulness always takes time. (12:11)
- God's correction is designed to provide well-trained, mature Christians for the church – rather than immature, poorly trained brats. (12:11)
- And once again, all of these wonderful results will be produced in our lives as we consistently:
 - Consider the sufferings of Jesus.
 - Remember that God treats us as sons.
 - Trust that God knows what He's doing.
- In closing, let's read that opening passage again from Proverbs 3.

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