

58-12-03.wpd --Understanding God's Discipline
 trial, suffering, hardship, difficulty, faith, discipline, Fatherhood
 Heb 12:4-13

Christian faith sees the Father's hand in all of life's circumstances.

INTRODUCTION:

--"Take up your cross and follow Me." We think of those words of Jesus in terms of self-denial. Hebrews 12 first points to Christ's death on the cross, then says in **v.4**, "*In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*" In other words, "*If you're reading this, you're not dead yet! Keep on carrying your cross and following Jesus!*" --They were not dead *yet*, but they *were* suffering persecution, as Christ had predicted, and some of them might have to die as martyrs. But in that persecution or in any other trials of life, the author of Hebrews was trying to help them keep the right attitude. To do this, he emphasized the importance of faith in God. He explained how they could understand suffering in terms of God's discipline rather than....

I. Looking at Suffering Without Faith

- A. That starts by *forgetting* the Fatherhood of God-- **v.5a**, And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons...
1. God by nature is all-powerful, but power alone doesn't make Him *human-friendly*. Our only hope as humans is that God is also LOVE, and that all His power is available to His love.
 2. God reveals His love to us in His *Fatherhood*. (Not just a Creator-creature relationship, but the intimate relationship of a Parent to a child.)
 3. What this means practically is that *any suffering* experienced in life must pass first through the loving heart of a Father and then through the *omnipotent power of His hand* in order to reach us.
- B. BUT we can respond dysfunctionally to suffering when we forget the Fatherhood of God-- **v5b**, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you.)
1. Treating it lightly or stoically: "*Oh, it's nothing. It's trivial. It's just a normal part of life. Calamity happens to us all. Just ignore it!*" (NO, we must see a Father's power involved in it!)
 2. OR, being disheartened by it: "*God doesn't care! He doesn't see! He doesn't love me anymore!*" (NO, an all-wise Father is

allowing us to walk this pathway. A God of love is leading us!)

TRANS: Christianity parts from other religions in this unique way of seeing in God the Creator the heart of a Father. **Christian faith sees the Father's hand in all of life's circumstances.** Others borrow that concept and sometimes use it effectively to cope with life's hardships, but Christians get the actual connection to God as Father by new birth -- being born into God's family as spiritual children. From that intimacy with God, we have a new perspective on life's trials, which is...

II. Seeing Suffering as Discipline

- A. Instead of *taking it lightly, despising it, or treating it as worthless*, instead of *collapsing in discouragement*, we are to (**v.7**) "*endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?*" **We can endure hardship as discipline because:**

1. It is governed by a loving hand-- **v.6a,8**, '*...the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.*' / *If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.* (Discipline in suffering is not something God Himself doesn't understand. He experienced it in actuality through the *Incarnation*-- Heb 5:8. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.) [poem: A Human-Friendly Faith

Death invaded a perfect world	an empty tomb to prove His victory.
when human trespass ruined it.	If sharing that victory is His offer,
The best a God of love could do	if that's how a destiny of eternal
to heal the world of human error	happiness
would be to become a human Himself.	comes to us from the hand of a loving
If not, then let the skeptics lead us!	God,
If so, then let all critics plead mercy!	then I can wait patiently for resurrection
They'd owe Him more than apologies....	during these few years of earthly time
They'd owe Him lives and allegiance.	before death meets its final destruction
	at the return of the God-Man.

Only one faith is really human-friendly.	No other faith is worthy of human trust.
Only one story tells of God becoming	Skepticism can preach, "Too good to be
human	true!"
to undo human bondage and defeat death.	Faith in a loving God says, "Too good
In that faith, God came and died and left	not to."
behind	

2. It is part of growing up-- **v.9**, *Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we*

submit to the Father of our spirits and live! [I appreciate my parents' disciplining me for misbehavior. But there's a question: "When do I finally grow up?" I think God has His own questions, "Do you still gossip, still complain, still butter up facts, still have unforgiveness, still envy my neighbors, still criticize others, still have areas of pride, still act selfishly?"]

3. It is not given *at the whim of God* (as we may have received it at the whim of an earthly father's changing disposition-- v.10a, *Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best,*), **BUT** it's by the loving will of God that we grow up to be like Him-- v.10b, *but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.*
- B. v.11a, *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.*--*Enduring hardship* does not take away the pain, but like labor, it brings us through to the birth [childbirth-- When I think of enduring hardship, I think of watching a mother in labor. There's anxiety, pain, exertion, and at the end, tremendous stretching, all of these taxing a woman's brain to the limit, and my encouragement for her is to focus on the goal, a newborn child.]

TRANS: Christian faith sees the Father's hand in all of life's circumstances. We have to remember, God the Father has a bigger plan for *the future* than we can see-- v.11b, *Later on... it* [God's discipline] *produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.* So what is our responsibility until that "later on" of the future gets here?

III. Watching Our Walk of Faith

- A. One thing we must do is (v.12) "*strengthen* [our] *feeble arms and weak knees*" -- How do we strengthen our faith for the journey of life? Through *prayer, the Word, and fellowship* (not always in church, but by visiting other Christians and reading good Christian books).
- B. Another thing is not to choose trouble on purpose, but instead (v.13a) "*Make level paths for your feet,*"
 1. Don't plan your own hardships [like the monks of old, who retreated to suffer in the Alexandrian deserts] (There is no scarcity of suffering in normal life-- Mat 6:34b, Each day has enough trouble of its own.)
 2. Choose to accept the discipline planned by a Father's hand-- Isa 40:3-4 (NKJV) The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; (God wants us to meet with victory as we walk through life's trials and

troubles, not to stumble in self-created hardships, (v.13b)"*so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.*"

CONCLUSION:

--**Christian faith sees the Father's hand in all of life's circumstances**, even in the midst of troubles. And that's because there's another hand holding ours, the hand of Jesus, who showed us the Father's love and who says to us in John 16:33, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Our victory over life's troubles is in Him.

Heb 12:4-13 (NIV) In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. {5} 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, {6} because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." {7} Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? {8} If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. {9} Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! {10} 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. {11} 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. {12} Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. {13} "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.