

Hebrews Chapter 11 the School of Faith

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes that trial and tribulation are a necessary part of our spiritual growth and development, and that they lead us to deeper faith, holiness, and righteousness.

Scripture: Hebrews 12:11, James 1:2

Topics: "Divine Discipline", "Faith through Trials"

Description

A.B. Simpson explores the profound connection between suffering and faith in his sermon on Hebrews Chapter 11. He emphasizes that trials are not merely punitive but are a form of divine discipline, akin to a loving parent's training of a child. Simpson illustrates how biblical figures achieved greatness through suffering, culminating in Christ, who endured the cross for our salvation. He encourages believers to view their trials as opportunities for growth and to trust in God's loving purpose, ultimately leading to the 'peaceable fruit of righteousness.' The sermon concludes with a call to embrace faith and courage in the face of adversity, reminding us that trials can deepen our holiness and prepare us for eternal life with God.

Transcript

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12: 11).

The mystery of suffering is deeply interwoven with every thread and fiber of the web of nature and of life. Not a blossom breathing its sweet fragrance on the air of spring but came from a buried seed or a bursting bulb. Not a shining pearl but was evolved from the suffering of the life that gave it birth. Not a human life but came into being through travail and sore agony. The world's oldest poem is a deep discussion of the mystery of suffering. The book of Job is the inspired drama which seeks to fathom the meaning of sorrow and affliction. Every heroic page in human history was gilded by some sacrifice or deed of daring or suffering. The glorious galaxy of Bible characters that have just been set forth in these verses as witnesses and types of faith were all evolved out of circumstances of severest trial, and reached their high achievements and splendid triumphs through such scenes and circumstances as these. They "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonments: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; . . . they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." It was thus they reached the heights of victory and won the great rewards of faith. And He who marks the climax of this series, Christ Himself, the Author and Finisher of our faith,

reaches His place at the "right hand of the throne of God" by enduring "the cross, despising the shame" and suffering the "contradiction of sinners against himself." It is suffering all the way through, but suffering transformed and glorified by victorious faith.

And so this chapter takes up the mystery of suffering and links it with the education of our faith. It is quite remarkable that immediately after the profound discussion which the apostle has just given of the subject of faith, the very first theme that he should introduce to us should be trial. And yet this is always God's order; after faith trial, after trial more faith. God never leads us into the eleventh chapter of Hebrews without also bringing us into the twelfth. The writer once heard George Muller say, when asked by a friend how one could have more faith, "My beloved brother, by having more trial."

I. THE NAME HERE GIVEN TO TRIAL

It is translated "chastening" in our revised version. Rotherham renders it "discipline," but the original means "son training." The training of a child; this is the beautiful phase of affliction which the Holy Spirit would impress upon every troubled heart. It is not judgment. It is not punishment. It is not even chastisement. Nay, it is not even the education of a school, but it is the education of a father or of a mother. There are some children who have had the great privilege of being educated by a loving mother, and it is a peculiar privilege where the mother has been fitted for her sacred task. There is a touch of tenderness in such a schooling that no conventional discipline can ever give. It is not as our schoolmaster, but as our loving Father; nay, as our very mother God, that the Holy Spirit teaches us and trains us for our future destiny. What a difference it makes when a trial comes, to see in it not the hand of an avenger, but the loving discipline of a father and the gentle admonition of a mother! God would not have us feel even the shadow of His anger. Judgment hardens the spirit and God never wants to break the spirit of His obedient child, but to win us by His love and transform us by His gentleness. Beloved, let us ever look upon our trials in the tender light of the Father's love. It is not the token of His displeasure, but the very pledge of His jealous love, a love so inexorable that it will not let us miss His holiest and best.

II. THE PRESENT EFFECT OF TRIAL

Not now "joyous, but grievous." We must not be disappointed if the blow is keenly felt and the trial is hard to endure. We must not wonder if the heart sinks in depression and every feeling and instinct is crushed for the time, and we must "count it all joy" when we cannot feel a throb of joy in our actual consciousness. It is true often that for the time "if need be, ye are in heaviness, through manifold temptations." There came an hour when even the Lord himself had to say, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death." It is not a sign of unbelief, rebellion or an unsanctified heart if the iron should enter the soul and the chastened spirit should cry like Him, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is hard to feel the blow of sharp disease and excruciating pain.

It is hard to see your loved ones suffer and be unable to relieve them. It is hard to see the grave close over our fondest treasures. It is hard to be scorched and blistered with the fiery heat of temptation and feel the very breath of hell upon our souls. It is hard to be wronged, misrepresented, betrayed by those who have trusted and benefitted, and like the Master, to meet the kiss of Judas and the denial of Peter. It is still harder to suffer the deep spiritual silences of God and find that even He has withdrawn the light of His countenance and the shining of His face. He knows how hard it is for He has felt the same, and He tenderly reminds us that He is not grieved with us when the fiery trial comes if it does seem strange, and is not joyous but grievous.

III. THE FRUIT OF TRIAL

"Nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." It is afterwards that it comes. Give it time to appear. The bleeding plant cut back by the gardener to a single bud might well seem to say, "How cruel! How harsh!" But wait a little until that single bud has burst into a rich hanging cluster and the purple grapes of autumn bear witness to the wisdom and the kindness of the gardener's knife. The lawn might well cry out against the sharp scythe and the crushing mower, as they leave the little plants bleeding and crushed. But wait until the soft velvet of that lawn carpets the ground with a glory that no upholsterer could imitate, and then compare it with the dry and withered stalks on yonder common, where the same grass has been allowed to grow untrained and run to seed, and you will not question the wisdom or the beneficence of the process. The precious gold might well cry out against the crushing roller, and the consuming flame. But wait a little, until the rough and rugged lump of ore has become the shining jewel, or the glistening chain of burnished gold, and you need no one to explain the crucible and the fire.

So God is putting His children through the ordeal of trial with a hand of infinite wisdom and perfect love, and the very "trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire," will be "found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

It is called the "peaceable fruit of righteousness." That is, it is both righteousness and peace. It corrects and directs our life into His perfect will. It shows us the weak places in our character and leads us to put on His righteousness and strength, and then it gives us the deeper peace and rest, the chastened tenderness, the mellow and subdued depth which you can always trace in those that have passed through God's deepest testings, and learned all the lessons in the school of heavenly discipline. It is all so different from the callow, crude, and shallow profession of souls that have learned it by rote, but have not yet lived it in the school of sorrow, or had it burned into their inmost being in the very crucible of God. Such souls have entered into a rest which never can be moved. Sorrow has burned out all that is combustible and only that is left, which, like the pure gold, even trial cannot consume but only purify the more.

IV. THE PROCESS THROUGH WHICH ALL THIS IS ACCOMPLISHED

"Unto them that are exercised thereby." Trial is not always a blessing. There are souls that suffer and are not sanctified, sweetened, and mellowed. There are trials that are wasted and thrown away. There are bitter tears that leave only desolation behind. There are lives that are scorched, soured, and crushed by their trials, and only driven farther from God and righteousness. Suffering in itself cannot sanctify; else Satan and his angels would long ago have been purified. Punishment is not a purifying process. Everything depends upon our attitude to the trial and our being exercised thereby. What does this mean?

1. "Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord." We are not to think too lightly of it. We are not to regard it as a mere accident or incident, and plan for its removal by our own counsels or the advice of others. God means that we shall feel it. It has a message for us, and He wants us to understand it and take it deeply to heart and hear what God the Lord will say.

2. On the other hand, we must "not faint when . . . rebuked of him"; rather when we are "reproved" of Him. We must not take it too much to heart. We must not let it discourage us or break our spirit. We must never look on the dark side. We must never see God's anger, but always His love. If we lose heart we shall be sure to miss the meaning of our trial, to fail to get our true lesson, and to fly from God instead of sweetly turning to Him in the hour of trial. It was thus that Israel lost their blessing. God was chastening them, but

in the chastisement He was there to meet them and to help them, and His gentle message was, "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." But they would not. They fell into a panic. They said, "We will flee upon horses." And they flew. But their pursuers flew faster, and God looked on and said, "Therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you." In the time of trouble our greatest danger is that we will become alarmed and run away from God instead of running into His everlasting arms. Therefore remember, no matter what the nature of your trial, no matter though you may yourself be to blame for it, do not give up your trust, do not give way to fear, do not become discouraged, faint not.

3. "Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Remember how much more severely He suffered. Remember how triumphantly He maintained His courage and His joy, how He endured the cross and despised the shame for the joy set before Him; and remember that what He once accomplished in His lone conflict He can still enable you to accomplish through Him.

4. "Lift up the hands which hang down." That is, take a firmer hold by the hand of faith. The time of trial is faith's opportunity. As the old colored man once said, "When God tests me I always turn around and test Him." Take more because you need more through His providence, and the trial that He has permitted. Tell Him that He has brought you into this hard place, and He must see you through. Stir up yourself "to take hold of his strength," and you will find that He will never be displeased with the boldness of your faith and the largeness of your believing claim.

5. "And the feeble knees." The knees may stand for prayer as the hands for faith, and if they do, it is needless to say that the time of trial is the time for prayer. It is God's challenge to ask more from Him. "Call upon me," He says, "in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me." "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things." Hard places are God's very challenges to prayer. Or the knees may stand for courage, the courage that strengthens itself to stand firmly upon His promises and upon the ground that faith has claimed. The feeble knees represent perhaps the paralysis of fear, when the knees smite together and the frame trembles with alarm. This is the effect of sorrow on the natural heart. But faith can give courage and take away our fear, and enable us to triumph in the darkest hour and shout before the ramparts fall. It is not our courage. It is the courage of faith. And so we are exhorted to "add to our faith courage." It is God's courage, not ours. He will clothe us with it in the time of need.

6. "Make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed." This seems to mean that we are not to turn aside from the obstacles of faith, but to press on through and above them, and take strength from God to enable us to do so. The feeble and the lame would naturally be tempted to go round the mountain, and the enemy would say you are not able for this hill of difficulty and this rugged height of danger. But faith takes God to heal the lame, and then it marches forward boldly and victoriously through every obstacle, and keeps right on its way rejoicing. Of course, this may literally be applied to the healing of bodily disease. Many a time through physical infirmity it seems almost unavoidable that God's servants should turn back from some task of difficulty and take the easy way of escape. But God will give us faith and strength to claim His healing power and go right on in the path of service and of duty, finding His grace sufficient from moment to moment, and His strength made perfect in our weakness.

But it also applies to difficulties of every sort, and inspires us with a faith that presses forward in the face of every discouragement and obstruction. So Israel, pressed on at the Red Sea, refusing to turn aside, and the floods divided and the way was opened for their escape and for the destruction of their foes. So Daniel pressed forward when he knew that his life was hanging in the balance and a little subterfuge might have saved him from the den of lions. But no, when he knew that the decree was passed, and that the spies were already skulking under his window and watching for him to fall into the snare, he went quietly home and, entering his house, he set his face steadfastly toward Jerusalem and prayed unto his God "as aforetime." There is a sublime heroism in those two words, "as aforetime." There was no advertising of his courage for the sake of showing it off. But he just went on as before in the consistent course of implicit faith and inexorable fidelity.

7. "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." This is the great end of all our trials, to lead us to be right with God and with our fellow men. In the hour of trial it is a great comfort to feel that our relationships with one another are right, and there is no unseemly strife or wrong. And above all else, trial comes to deepen our holiness and lead us to that sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord. The reference here seems to be to the Lord's coming. Holiness is the preparation for that glorious meeting in the air, and without it we shall not see Him when He comes, nor can we hope to share the welcome of His glorious Bride. But He does not expect us to work up this holiness by our own exertions. He tells us that we are to be "partakers of his holiness." Therefore trial comes to show us where our holiness is at fault that we may put on His righteousness and receive His grace and all-sufficiency. We shall be so glad some day when the supreme test comes that we have been already tried by fire and not left to go through the final conflict with armor unproved and weapons that may fail us in the crisis hour.

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