

God Answers Man's Suffering: Chastening

by Warren Wiersbe

God's chastening is a loving correction to help us grow and mature in our faith, and to assure us of our salvation.

Duration: 36:22

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1

Topics: "Divine Discipline", "Suffering And Hope"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the misconception that when difficulties arise, it is a sign that God does not love us. He uses the analogy of a parent disciplining their child to explain that God's discipline is a sign of His love for us. The preacher shares the story of David's sin with Bathsheba and how God disciplined him for his actions. He emphasizes that we should not despise or take lightly the discipline of the Lord, but also not faint or lose hope, as God has better things in store for us. The preacher encourages listeners to respond to God's discipline in the right way and reminds them of the example of Joseph, who was chastened by God for 13 years before being elevated to a position of authority.

Transcript

I am reading the word of God from Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 through 11. Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. 2 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

3 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. 4 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto sons. 5 My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him, for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

6 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons. 7 For what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, of which all sons are partakers, then are ye illegitimate children, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence.

8 Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. 9 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous. 10 Nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them who are exercised by it.

The chastening of the Lord is the theme of Hebrews 12. As we have seen in previous messages, some suffering comes from creation. All of creation is groaning and travailing.

And if you are human, you are going to suffer. Some suffering is from the conflict that we have with Satan. Some suffering is simply for the building of character.

Some suffering is that we might experience the companionship of God and of one another. But in Hebrews 12, the Lord says to us that some suffering is a part of chastening. The word chastening is often identified with punishment, and that is not always what it means.

How many, many times people who have been going through suffering have said to me, Pastor, for what is the Lord punishing us? Of course, the answer is the Lord may not be punishing you. Now there are times when chastening does involve punishment, as when a father has to punish his son for disobedience. The word chastening simply means child training, or if you want to substitute a better word, substitute the word education.

The word that is translated chastening here in Hebrews 12 is the Greek word that was used for education. It used to perplex me that this chapter began with a foot race. He starts off with the running of a race.

Down in verse 4, he uses the word striving, which is a word of athletics, the agony, the working of the athlete. Then he starts talking about children. This used to perplex me.

Then I discovered that in Greece, every child was given athletic training as a part of its education, starting at the age of seven and continuing until maturity. So the writer puts together these two concepts. Here is a child, and this child has to be trained, and a part of his training is in sports.

The Greeks, as you know, were great believers in a sound mind in a sound body. Consequently, the Holy Spirit has put together two interesting concepts, childhood and sports, training. And into this concept we're going to look this morning, this matter of chastening.

Chastening does not necessarily mean punishing. It could mean perfecting. If you'll just think of the child with all of his potential, and yet think of the child with all of his weaknesses and all of his built-in inherited problems, you'll understand what the Lord is up against when he tries to make something out of us.

Think of the child going through exercises and running the race and wrestling, and then see the child growing up, and you'll have some idea of what he's talking about when he talks about chastening. Now, when the Lord chastens us, it is because he has three purposes that he wants to fulfill. And these three purposes are spelled out for us in Hebrews chapter 12.

In verses 1 through 4, it's the purpose of enduring. He wants to keep us going. In verses 5 through 8, it's the purpose of assuring.

He wants to keep us knowing. And in verses 9 through 11, it's the purpose of maturing. He wants to keep us growing.

Now, this helps us to understand some of the suffering we go through. God permits us, in fact, God himself touches us with the loving hand of chastening, that he might fulfill these purposes in our lives. The purpose of enduring, he doesn't want us to be quitters.

The purpose of assuring, he wants us to know who we are and who he is. And finally, the purpose of maturing, he wants us to develop spiritual muscles and be able to run the race. Let's consider now these three purposes individually and find out how they help us in the suffering of life.

Verses 1 through 4 of Hebrews 12, here's his first purpose, the purpose of enduring. He wants to keep us going. Now, the book of Hebrews was written to the Hebrews.

I can still remember hearing Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse say when he taught the book of Hebrews, the book of Hebrews was written to the Hebrews to tell them to quit being Hebrews. Because the people to whom this book was sent were in danger of doing what the Jewish nation had done for centuries, go back. No sooner had God delivered the Jewish nation from the land of Egypt and they wanted to go back, they crossed the Red Sea.

They saw the Egyptian soldiers sinking in the Red Sea. They sang that great song there at the edge of the Red Sea. They turned around and headed toward the promised land.

And then they got hungry and they got thirsty and they began to murmur and complain and said, oh, that we had stayed in Egypt. Oh, that we were still by the flesh pots of Egypt. Oh, that we still had the leeks and the onions and the garlic.

They forgot the bondage. They forgot the whips. They forgot the long hours and the heavy burdens.

They wanted to go back. And the theme of Hebrews is let us go on. Let's keep going.

And so they wandered for some 40 years in the wilderness until that generation of unbelievers died off and God took the new generation and entered into the promised land. No sooner did they get into the promised land and they had some defeats. But they said, oh, that we had stayed on the other side of the river.

Have you ever been like that? You've trusted the Lord and you've been saved and now you're walking with the Lord and you take some step of faith and it gets to be difficult. You say, oh, that I had stayed in the playpen. Oh, that I hadn't taken this promotion.

Oh, that I hadn't left the farm. Ever talk like that? Well, the book of Hebrews is for you then because the people he was writing to were in danger. Well, look at verse 3 of getting weary and fainting in their minds.

There is a spiritual weariness. There is a wrestling against the enemies of our soul. And there are times when not only is the body weary, but there are times when the mind is weary and we faint in our hearts and we just want to give up.

We say, I can't lift one more foot. I can't take one more step. And about that time, God says, all right, I'll have to chase in you.

I've got to keep you going. The Christian life cannot stand still. I've heard people say, you know, I'm standing still in my Christian life.

And of course, we know they are not because you either go backward or forward. The book of Hebrews says, I want you to move forward, looking unto Jesus, run that race, keep going, keep going, keep going. He gives us this experience of chastening for enduring.

Now, this word patience in verse 1 is the word endurance. The same is the word endure in verse 2 and down in verse 3. It's used again in the later verses. Verse 7, it's a difficult thing to endure.

I tell you, if you're living the kind of a Christian life, God wants you to live. There are difficulties. You're running the race and there are difficulties.

You're wrestling against the devil. Verse 3, he talks about how the Lord had to endure contradiction of sinners. How the Lord had to endure the cross.

Look at verse 2, He endured the cross. Verse 3, He endured the contradiction. And if we're following in His steps, we have to endure.

The word endure means to keep on going. It doesn't mean to put up with something. It means to keep on going in spite of something.

The greatest heroes in the world today do not always have their pictures in the hall of fame. You won't find their names in the card catalogs of the library. The greatest heroes in the world today are those quiet Christians who endure.

They endure crosses. They endure contradiction. They are resisting against sin and they want to keep on going.

Now, how does chastening help us? Well, verse 1 says that when the Lord chastens us, He gets rid of the hindrances in our life. Chastening is not always sickness. Chastening is not always physical affliction.

Sometimes it is. But verse 1 says God wants to get rid of the weights. A friend of mine was visiting an ancient museum over in Asia Minor, and the guide was showing them the various things in the cases, and he saw some, they looked like stone dumbbells.

And he said to the guide, what are those things there? He said, they're weights. Well, he said, what are they for? Oh, he said, those were used by the Greek runners. Whenever they trained for their races, they would either carry these weights or have them on them so that when they were off, they felt lighter.

You've seen the baseball players do this when they're about to step up to bat. They'll pick up three or four bats and swing them around, and then they'll pick up their favorite bat, and it feels as light as a feather, and they can strike out easier that way. And my friend made a little notation in his mind.

That's Hebrews chapter 12. What a fool a runner would be to carry the weights. Some of us have a hard time running because we are carrying the weight.

God has to chasten us to get out of our lives, not necessarily sins, but hindrances. There are things in our lives that keep us from making progress and from enduring. And so God has to come and chasten us and say, I'm taking that away from you.

But Lord, that hurts. I'm taking it away. I want you to endure.

And the only way you're going to keep on going is to get rid of that. He talks about the sin, which so easily besets us. That Greek phrase just simply means it gets caught in our legs, and we can't run.

It's like poor Linus with his blanket. When he tries to run around the bases, he can't make it. You can't run the race wearing that which is going to entangle your feet.

And so God has to chasten us and get us to get rid of those entanglements. I'm sure that many of us right now have things in our lives that could not be called sins. They aren't dealt with in the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount, but they are things in our lives that weight us down and we can't run like we should.

They are things that entangle our feet. They're keeping us from making progress. And my friend, if we don't make progress, we go backward.

And so God says, all right, I've got to chasten you. I've got to chasten you. Get rid of that.

Now, chastening also helps us to endure by reminding us to trust the Lord more, looking unto Jesus. I don't know about you, but when God's chastening hand comes to my life, I instantly look up. I say, Lord, he said, you should have said that a long time ago.

Lord, good to hear you say that, son. Looking unto Jesus. Keep your eye on Jesus.

You can't run the race looking at everybody else. The chief indoor sport of most Christians today is people watching. When you read Christian periodicals, you wonder if they ever do look to Jesus.

They're looking at everything else. They're finding out what's wrong with this one and what's wrong with that one. And my Bible says, look, look to Jesus.

That's how your Christian life started. You look to him. Look unto me and be saved.

All the ends of the earth. That's how the whole thing got started. You look to Jesus.

That's how the whole thing continues. Just keep looking to him by faith. And when you think you can't go one further step, you say, oh, he went the whole way for me.

He's the author of my faith. That word author means pioneer. He's the pioneer of my faith.

He's the perfecter of my faith. He's the Alpha. He's the Omega.

Being confident of this very thing that he that hath begun the good work will also perform it, complete it. So when God chastens us, he forces us to look to Christ and trust him. More than that, when our Lord chastens us, it forces us to remember what he's done for others.

Hebrews chapter 11. We're surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses. And you say, oh, I can't give up this or that.

Abraham did. I can't give my son, my daughter to the Lord. Abraham did.

I can't give up that good job to serve the Lord. Moses did. I can't lay down my life for him.

The martyrs did. I can't walk into that dim future. Joshua did.

When you read Hebrews chapter 11, you realize that God enabled other people to keep on going. There were days when Moses wanted to quit, when he wanted to die. There were days when Abraham was ready to fold up his tent and leave.

There were times when Joshua fell on his face before God and didn't want to keep going, and God kept him going. That's the first purpose for chastening. It doesn't mean God's punishing us.

It means God wants us to endure. It's for the purpose of enduring. He wants us to keep going.

And he removes the hindrances. Now, the second purpose for chastening is for the purpose of not just enduring, but assuring. Verses 5 through 8. You see, when you and I find ourselves in trouble, in difficulty, in suffering, Satan comes and says, uh-huh, you must not be saved.

Ever had that experience? Things are rough. The Lord is chastening you. And Satan says, well, if your father loved you, this would never have happened.

And the answer is, no, it happened because my father does love me. You see, we who have been parents know that children have to be chastened. It's not a judge punishing a criminal.

It is a loving father perfecting a child. In fact, many of the juvenile delinquents that I have worked with in years gone by have confessed to me that their parents did not discipline them, and they didn't really believe their parents loved them. I don't know if you've ever noticed that a child usually, after being disciplined, loves you more.

And I would hope that our children could say to us, father, mother, thank you for loving me too much to let me have my own way. Thank you in love you put some fences up and you said this far and no farther. It kept me from being confused in a world that has no fences.

And so God chastens us for the purpose of assuring. He wants to keep us knowing. Knowing what? Knowing that we're saved.

I tell you, my friend, if you can continue rebelling against God and God doesn't spank you, it's a sign you've never been born again. I didn't say that. The writer said that.

He says every father chastens his own son. God chastens every son that he receives. And if you aren't chastened, it's evidence that you are an illegitimate child.

I've often felt like spanking the neighbor's children, but I didn't dare do it. I don't doubt that the neighbors may have at times wanted to spank my children. They didn't dare do it.

But God spans his children. It's an evidence that we are really saved. Whom the Lord loves, he chastens.

It's an evidence that he loves us. You see, we Christians get such strange ideas. We think that when difficulty comes, it's a sign that God doesn't love us.

And children sometimes are this way. All of us have heard little children say, you don't love me anymore. And mother says, I do love you.

I love you so much it hurts. And you don't believe this, but it hurts me more than it hurts you when I spank you. Here's David.

David came home from the battle one day, took off his armor. It's always a dangerous thing. Take off your armor.

His eyes got to wandering. He saw his neighbor's wife. He got involved with his neighbor's wife.

One sin led to another. And David covered the whole thing up. And God said, David, I'm going to have to spank you.

I can't permit you to live in unconfessed sin. And so God proved his love to David by chastening him. Read Psalm 32.

Read Psalm 51. Find out what happened to David during that year when he tried to cover up his sin. And God said to him, I love you too much for that to happen.

And he had to chasten him. God does not want any pampered children. Sometimes he rebukes us.

Sometimes he scourges us. But he's never going to leave us to ourselves. There's a cross-reference here that we ought to look at, I think.

It's over in 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul's been talking about the sins in the Corinthian church. 1 Corinthians 11, verse 30, because of the way they have been disobeying God, for this cause many are weak among you, and many sleep. Now, the indication there is that some of God's people were going through sickness and weakness, and some of them had died because of God's chastening.

Now, keep your place there in 1 Corinthians 11. Listen to what it says in verse 9 of Hebrews 12. We have had fathers of the flesh who corrected us.

Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live? The suggestion is if we're not in subjection to the Father, we may not live. There is a sin unto death. Back to 1 Corinthians 11.

For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. And so, God chastens us for the purpose of enduring to keep us going, and for the purpose of assuring to keep us knowing.

Knowing what? Knowing that we're His children, and knowing that He loves us, and knowing that He would rather see us dead than deliberately, flagrantly disobeying His will and bringing disgrace to His name. Now, there's a third purpose for His chastening. He chastens us for the purpose of maturing, verses 9 through 13.

Not only does God want to keep us going, and not only does God want to keep us knowing, but God wants to keep us growing. That's the whole theme of Hebrews, let us go on. The key here is sonship.

Back in verse 5, my son despise not the Lord. God speaks unto you as sons. Over here in verse 7, God dealeth with you as with sons.

That word son means mature children. God's speaking here about maturity. What He says in verse 9 is rather obvious.

He said, we had earthly fathers who chastened us, and we obeyed them. Shouldn't we obey our heavenly Father? Our earthly fathers were fathers of the flesh, but our heavenly Father is the Father of our spirit.

We've been born again through the Spirit of God.

Our earthly fathers chastened us during childhood until we grew up, but our heavenly Father chastens us all during our lives. He knows how easy it is for us to slip back. We never get to the place in our spiritual lives where we do not need the chastening of the Lord.

And about the time we come to that place where we think we don't need His chastening, we really need it. Our earthly fathers chastened us as it seemed good to them, and many times they made mistakes. I am sure there were times I chastened my children for things they didn't do.

But your heavenly Father never is that way. He chastens us with perfect knowledge. He knows all about us.

He knows how much we can take. He knows what we have done. He sees the thoughts and the motives of our hearts.

Our earthly parents chastened us for what we did outwardly, but God sees what we think and what we are inwardly. Our earthly parents dealt only with conduct, but God deals with character. God says, I want you to grow up.

I want you to mature. Nobody ever matured in the Christian life apart from chastening. Abraham suffered.

Moses suffered. Not because of their sins, but that God might help them mature. Joseph, you'll forgive me for saying this, but I believe it.

Joseph was somewhat of a spoiled brat when he was sold by his brothers. He was being pampered by his father, and had Joseph stayed with Jacob, he would have become a spoiled kid. And God said, I got better things in store for you, and Joseph became a servant.

Joseph became a prisoner. God spent 13 years chastening Joseph to make a king out of him. Took him out of the playpen and put him on the throne.

Took him 13 years, but he did it. And God wants to do that with you and me. The trouble is, we won't respond the way we are supposed to.

Did you ever watch a child who is being spanked who fights, and the more he fights, the worse it gets? I have an evangelist friend who has a great host of homey illustrations that some of you won't understand because you were born 30 years too late. But some of us can remember when mother or dad would use a stick to spank us. Now, my dad used to use his belt.

He had the fastest belt in northern Indiana. But on the farm, where I did not grow up, but on the farm, they'd send the kid out and let him cut a switch. And my evangelist friend who grew up on the farm said, my mother would send me out to get a switch, and I'd go out and cut a switch, and she'd check it out, see if it was all right, and she'd start to whip me.

And he said, I noticed something. The closer I got to her, the less it hurt. That's good theology.

That's good theology. The closer you get to the father, the less it's going to hurt. That's why he whips us sometimes.

He says, you're straying away, you're rebelling, you're doing it your way, and I want to bring you back, and the only way I can do it is to whip you. Now, what are we supposed to do? Well, there's some people who treat all this very lightly. Verse 5, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord.

Don't take it lightly. There's the other extreme. There are those who faint.

They say, oh, I'm done for. Here are two extremes, despising it, fainting under it. He said, no, don't do that.

I want you to exercise yourself under it. Verse 11, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them who are exercised by it. Spiritual exercise.

Those who endure. Those who are subjected to the Lord. The whole secret is in verse 9. We gave our earthly fathers reverence.

Let's show reverence to our heavenly Father. Let's respect Him. We were in subjection to our earthly fathers.

Let's be in subjection to the Father of our spirits. Why does God chasten that He might mature us? What is the first evidence of maturity? Loving subjection and obedience. And of course, the result of all of this is for our profit.

Verse 10, God chastens us for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness, that we might have a deeper walk with God. Holiness doesn't come from reading a book. Holiness comes from walking with the Lord.

Verse 11, there's no joy, but afterward there's joy. Afterward, there's fruit. Afterward, there's peace.

Afterward, there's righteousness. Afterward, there's new strength in your spiritual muscles because you've been exercised. Afterward.

Those two words are tremendous. Nevertheless, afterward. But Lord, it's so hard, ah, but afterward.

I can't keep going, but afterward. So don't faint. Don't despise it.

Rather, exercise. Endure. Submit.

Respect. And the result will be spiritual maturity. Some of the sufferings of life come directly from the hand of God because God loves His children.

Therefore, the purpose of enduring, He wants to keep you going. Therefore, the purpose of assuring, He wants to keep you knowing that He loves you. And that you're His child.

And for the purpose of maturing, He wants to keep you growing. He wants to build into us the kind of grown-up character that glorifies Him. Therefore, despise not the chastening of the Lord.

And don't faint when you're rebuked of Him. For whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth. And He scourges every son that He receives.

Let's be in submission to Him. Though we don't always understand, let's bow before Him and say, Great Father, Loving Father, here I am. Have Thine own way.

We're thankful, our Father, that You love us too much to pamper us. Jesus purchased us. We are not cheap.

And You would not have us to experience cheap character. May the character that You build into our lives be strong and deep, holy. May there be no duplicity in our lives.

May we have that kind of mature integrity that You can bless. I pray for any of your children today who are going through chastening. I pray, Father, You'll give them the grace to endure.

Speak to them through the Word and assure them, and through it all, mature them to become more like Christ. I pray for those here without the Savior who've never been born again, that they might come and become children of God through faith in Christ. Oh, Father, how wonderful it is to know that You love us, that when Your hand touches us, it is the touch of love.

Build us and build Your church for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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