

Never Give Up
Hebrews 12:3-11
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We turn this morning in God's Word as we continue in Hebrews 12:3-11.

Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself so that you may not grow weary and fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 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. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves and chastises every son whom He receives."

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? If you are left without discipline, in which you have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 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? 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. 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.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please pray with me.

Heavenly Father, we thank you this morning for your Word. I ask that you would help us to receive it with hearts receptive to your message, to your call to never give up, to never give in, for you are with us. And our trials, our suffering is used by you to strengthen us. Lord, it hurts. It is hard. We want it to go away, and yet, we have to trust. You call us to trust in the One who is good that the discipline of suffering and trial will be for our good. Help us, O Lord, to trust in you and to walk and not grow faint. In Jesus's name. Amen.

Nearly 77 years ago next week, a speech was given by the prime minister of England, Churchill. It was not a commencement speech as some have thought it to be. It was simply a return to his alma mater, and he was asked to give a few remarks. These were just a few.

"Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never. In nothing, great or small, large or petty, never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy. We stood alone a year ago, and to many countries it seemed that our account was closed. We were finished. All this tradition of ours – our songs, our school history, this part of the history of this country – were gone, finished, and liquidated.

"Very different is the mood today. Britain, other nations thought, had drawn a sponge across her slate. But instead, our country stood in the gap. There was no flinching, no thought of giving in, and by what seemed almost a miracle to those outside these islands, though we ourselves never doubted it, we now find ourselves in a position where I say that we can be sure that we have only to persevere, to conquer."

This speech that Churchill gave 77 years ago next week was said by this preacher to the people who would first receive this letter, this sermon, it is tantamount to saying: never, never, never give in. The question is, how do we learn not to give in? By what means? How are we to understand suffering in this passage? How are we to understand discipline in this passage? If we flatten out the meaning and we miss the nuance, we will miss its crucial application. It isn't: never give in by your own strength. Never give in because the One who has accomplished salvation for us is our champion. And He is with us even in the midst of our suffering, and it is particularly in our trials and our suffering that He is present. Never, never give in.

Let's look at God's Word together as you see in the outline Christ Our Exemplar, verses 3-4, Endurance, 5-10, Discipline, verse 11. Together, Christ Our Exemplar. When you look at verses 3-4, he tells us and calls us to look again to who Christ is who has endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. He's setting up perfectly something which needs to be remembered, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ and what Jesus accomplished for us is not merely the satisfaction and cleansing of sin for our salvation. It is that. Jesus died as an atonement for our sins. He died as a sacrifice so that His blood might cleanse us from our sin.

Therefore, we are proclaimed righteous in His sight. We are united to Christ in His death. But it is not merely an accomplishment of forgiveness for our sins, a cleansing of our guilt. It is also to be seen as Christ as our victor, as our champion. And when he says in verse 3, "Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility," he's setting up for us an example. Christ coming to the Cross and on the Cross had to undergo great suffering and persecution to the point, he tells us here, to blood.

And he says by way of contrast, "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." So, in looking at Christ as our victor, we must understand he continues in this athletic metaphor. The language which he is using there is the continuance of the language which he has talked about in the life of faith as running the race. And most commentators believe that what he has in view here was a form of fighting which was still practiced in the Roman Pentathlon, and that was armed boxing where there was obvious shedding of blood in the midst of the fight.

So, what he is suggesting here is that Christ, who is our champion, went into war not against human flesh but against him who wanted to raise accusations against Him, Satan himself. For our enemy is not human flesh. It is the one who seeks to drown us, the one who seeks to defeat us, the one who sought to try to catch Jesus through the mouths and instruments of human beings. It is Satan who is the enemy. And so, when He fought against these persecutions to the point of His death when He received the onslaught of insult and their attempts at shaming Him, He was victorious over it. And so, he says, "But you, dear friends, have in your struggle against sin have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." So, he's saying that Christ is our exemplar, meaning He's gone before us. He is our champion. He is the boxer who has gone into the ring. But he's saying by necessity of being a disciple of Jesus, we, too, have to enter into that same fight. We are not exempt from this battle.

Now, one of the nuances we must pick up here is the word that is translated there "sin." Now, in verse 1 of chapter 12, he uses "sin" in a different way than he's using it here. This sin which he was talking about in verse 1, you'll remember, he says, "Endure in your fight against sin. Do not be distracted by it." So, the sin which he's talking about there is the sin which we choose to commit, the sin which so easily entangles us and distracts us. But in the context of these verses, he's using it in a different way. The sin that is being talked about here is the sin that is perpetrated on those who attack us and who attack those who proclaim Christ, or the suffering you experience because you name His name.

So, he's not saying to them who are tempted to let it go, to flee the fight, to walk away from Christ. He's saying, in your struggle you haven't yet fought against sin to the point of shedding blood. The implication is if you want to follow Jesus and name His name, the disciple must be ready to go into battle, not against human beings, but against the one who seeks to persecute, to belittle, to shame. What, you

believe that? That's just a myth. The Bible's not real. You can't believe that. You really believe that God had a Son? Give me a break. Or, faith is just a private matter, keep it to yourself, thank you very much.

But there, the enemy is not the other person. It's the philosophy of the world that says that Jesus is not worthy of worship, that the Bible is not worthy of our trust. But we must remember if you are a believer and a disciple of Jesus Christ, we did not believe it because we discovered it on our own. No. It was revealed to us. We received it. And as recipients of the gift, we hold a treasure of which there is a great enemy and that is Satan. Jesus, who is our exemplar, has defeated him. He is victorious over sin and death and dominion, and the weapon of his choice, death.

Therefore, I say to you along with all those within the Christian tradition who have taught the following, death is no longer used as a penalty for you. Therefore, the weapon – the nuclear weapon in Satan's armor – is death itself. So, therefore, anyone who would come and those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, what can they do? What can they take from us? They took nothing from Christ. And those who are in Christ, nothing can be taken from you. Oh sure, material goods. Sure, reputation. But not your union with Christ. This is the victory that is ours. This is the promise.

And as we consider this, then, if this is the promise, Christ who's our exemplar, if we are ourselves to remember that we are called to resist, to enter into willingly the reception of persecution and trial, he goes further to say something more about endurance. So, if you look at verse 5 and following, he says,

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

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be wear when reproved by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves and chastises every son whom He receives.”

This is the use of wisdom literature from the Old Testament that Hebrews is appropriating in this context. And here what we must first recognize if we are to understand anything with regard to endurance and the call to endure, we must understand its relational context. This whole discussion of endurance and discipline is within the context of being in a relationship with a loving Father, One who cares for us, One who knows us, One who knows our weaknesses and our strength, knows where we need to grow. And so, when we face trial and difficulty and persecution, it is done remembering that it is the Lord who is sovereign. And He allows it not because He's punishing us but because we are His children if you call Him by name.

But we must go further. When he talks about here that “the Lord disciplines the ones He loves and chastises every son whom He receives,” we must remember that there is a range of meaning here. There is in the range and the use of chastisement and discipline this idea of disciplining as punishment because of the consequences of our sinful actions. That's one meaning. But there's another meaning, and that why we must be careful in not collapsing it in the English as simply being punishment. It is also used as training for strengthening more like athletic training, so that the Lord in making us stronger knowing the battle, knowing the difficulty of it, because Christ has gone before us. He allows discipline and chastisement, for those to come against us, for your faith to be berated, for the temptations of the evil one not to believe. He allows these things so that we might endure.

This is what is being called for. And the essential ingredient we must remember is that it is a part of God testing and preparing us, not one of punitive action. It doesn't mean that the Lord doesn't discipline because we fail, and the Lord allows us to experience the consequences of our sin. I'm just suggesting that's not what's in view here. What is in view here is the Lord using these things to prepare us, to make us more and more dependent on Him and less on ourselves. He's calling us, in fact, to remember that He uses this so that we might understand, as one writer Dr. Sinclair Ferguson says,

“Christ is not offered to us in the Gospel as a panacea for our fears knowing Christ doesn't remove our fears. Rather, He is the deliverer from that

bondage to Satan which engenders the fear of death and gives rise to many other fears.”

In essence, what Ferguson is suggesting is the Lord allows us, even sovereign providentially, allows us to undergo great trial, even suffering, for us to see that that which we thought we feared that would take us – would destroy us – doesn’t in fact have the power to do so because it didn’t do so to Christ. And it will not do so to those who believe in Him.

This is the utter reality of learning how to train as an athlete. You can’t learn to run a marathon unless you train for a marathon. You can’t learn to swim in a triathlon if you never actually get into a pool – or you can try, it’s not going to go so well. If you don’t swim, you don’t run, you don’t ride a bike, it’s not going to go so well. You have to prepare for the suffering so that you might finish the race.

This is the point of endurance, and we will say it is a demonstration, the passage tells us. It’s a demonstration of being His children. Satan would have us believe that our trials and sufferings are an example of God’s lack of existence. What the text tells us here, do not believe that lie for suffering and trial, as which is talked about here, is evidence that we do belong to Him because our faith is being tested. And if our faith is being tested, we’re being called to never give in and never give up and to trust in the Lord our God.

But it isn’t just for the sake of endurance. It is talking about the nature of discipline. And here, I want to make sure I do justice, and so I wanted to get to this point. When you look at verse 7 and following, it talks about discipline. It is for discipline that you have to endure. And as I’ve said already, the idea of discipline here is preparatory, not punitive. And we must understand the range of discipline within the Scriptures. But in this preparatory, what exactly is He preparing us for? He’s preparing us to be in His presence. He is making us more and more holy. And yes, it would be great if I could learn holiness without having to be tested, but I can’t. And the passage tells us that the evidence of being His children means that we fall under the loving gaze of a Father who knows that we need discipline.

Now, let me be clear. I’m going to beat this nail because I want to be a hammer on this point. There is suffering because of the consequences of your sin. I was 13 years old, didn’t know Jesus from Adam’s house cat. Didn’t want anything to do with Christianity. I loved to rebel, just like my brothers. I wanted to spend the night out with my friends so we could go out in the middle of the night and go skateboarding, do whatever we thought was rebellious. So, that’s what we did. So, one night me and my best friend slept out in the tent in the backyard, of which we had no intention of staying there. So, we took our skateboards, we went onto this newly paved road where there was building and construction. And we liked to do stupid things that kids do. And a police officer comes down that road and we just run. Nothing to see here, right?

So, the police officer pursues. I go deep in the woods, didn’t get caught, started calling out my friend’s name, no answer. I’m like, where is he? I kept calling out his name, nothing. So, I skated all the way back home. I’m going up the bike path, and I see every light in the house on. And I’m like, no. So, I go into the front door. My father is standing there, my mom is sitting in the living room chair, and a police officer knocks at the door. And I’m like, good grief.

So, in that moment, I deserved and received discipline because of the foolishness of my disobedience. But we take that view of discipline and we project it onto God and believe that all discipline is because of something we’ve done wrong as if God in His house is waiting there by the front door waiting for the prodigal to get home. We cross the threshold of the house. We hang our heads, and we say, I know. I know, I’ve done it again. And the Lord takes our phone away for a month.

That is not what is in view here. We are not defined by being prodigals. We are defined by the loving grace and mercy of our heavenly Father who says, I know what’s coming, my Son has already gone ahead of you. I know the temptation. I know the trial. I know the suffering. I know it. I am there with you. But know this, I allow these things to happen not because you are sinners but because you are my child

and I mean to make you stronger. As the passage says, “we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them.” For they disciplined us for a short time in what seemed best to them. But He disciplines us for our good that we may share His holiness. For the moment, discipline seems painful rather than pleasant. But later, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness, peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Before I finish, I want to say this. There are all kinds of suffering. And I can’t answer the question why this kind and why now. One of the most well-respected atheists in the world right now, Yuval Noah Harari, can’t answer that question either. For some would say that the greatest question before Christianity is why suffering? But I say, why can’t one of the most well-respected atheists answer that question either. For he says very clearly in these words, “I think we don’t need to find our role in the universe. The really important thing is to liberate ourselves from suffering. What characterizes conscious beings,” that is beings who have imagination and not just brains, not just a brain in our skull but we have imagination and we experience suffering. He says,

“What characterizes beings in contrast to robots, to stones, or to whatever is that they suffer, can suffer. And what they should focus on is not finding their place in some mysterious cosmic drama. They should focus on understanding what suffering is, what causes it, and how to be liberated from it.”

You hear that? He recognizes the presence of suffering, but he can’t answer why. But Christianity has ventured to offer that answer. There is a range of suffering. All suffering to a degree is difficult and it is often bitter. And it is not fun. And I’m in polite company, I would want to say other things. It is not fun, but I can’t answer why. But I do know that this passage gives us some key to understanding that it is the Lord who is with us in it and that He is good. And that He will use our suffering helping us to see that we can rely and trust upon Him, and that He is good. And that in trusting in Him, He will enable us as we endure by His grace to experience the fruitful peace of righteousness.

And so, I say to you in the midst of this reality, in the midst of this suffering, in the midst of this discipline, I say and offer to you the words of Saint Augustine when he wrote in his confessions the following.

“O, the twisted roads I walked. Whoa to my outrageous soul that hope for something better if it withdrew from you. The soul rolls back and forth onto its back, onto one side and then another, onto its stomach. But every surface is hard, and you’re the only rest. But look, you’re here, Lord, freeing us from our unhappy wandering, setting us firmly on your track, comforting us, and saying, ‘Run the race. I’ll carry you. I’ll carry you to the end. And even at the end, I’ll carry you.’”

What the Lord is telling us here is that He allows this to strengthen us for the race. And while discipline and suffering in the moment is unpleasant, because He is with us He will turn it for our good that we might rely on Him and see Him and know that He is the one who says: run the race, for I will carry you, and even at the end, I will carry you. Never give up for the Lord is with us. Let’s pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you this morning for your Word. We ask that you would feed us and strengthen us. I pray particularly for those this morning who are experiencing trial and suffering of various kinds. May your love and mercy and grace be close to the broken hearted and to the suffering. But may all of us be able to reflect and rest in the reality that you are here with us, that you carry us, and that you will enable us to receive the fruitful peace of righteousness because Christ has gone before us, Christ our champion. And by His name, and by His grace, and by the presence of your Holy Spirit may we never give up. In Jesus’s name. Amen.