

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

God's Loving Discipline, Part 1

Scripture: Hebrews 12:5-11

Code: 90-200

Recently, it seems as though there have been many difficult tragedies that have occurred in our church family. It wasn't but a few weeks ago we were with a young couple in our church, the Neednoggles, who are dear friends to our family, and they lost their precious little Steven, just a little newborn baby they put down at 7:30, and by 10:30 he was blue and died on the way to the hospital. Two friends of mine that I went to high school with died of cancer. One lived three weeks after diagnosis. The other lived eight weeks after diagnosis and left behind a family of Christian people struggling with the reasons for all of these things...I was in the hospital last night with Tom Ellison from our congregation who was rushed into surgery the night before because there was some very confusing kinds of infection in his spinal column, and he's very challenged, of course, to get through all of this and suffering greatly with pain and things like that.

People have asked me numerous times in dealing with all of these things, "Why do you think the Lord is letting this happen?" People asked me that when I recently went through an illness, "What is the Lord trying to say to you? What is the Lord trying to teach you? Do you really understand what the purposes of God are in this?" In fact, somebody asked me that on the telephone just two days ago.

We have had a number of funerals in our congregation, as...as some of you know who have attended them. And families have been bereaved. And life is full of those difficulties. This morning we had elders prayer for dear Bud Buzby. Been a part of our church for many, many years. In fact, he was here before I came, and he's still here. He's having surgery in a week. They're gonna remove part of his esophagus where they found cancer, and they've radiated that. Now they're gonna go in and take that section out.

And the question always comes up, "Why do bad things happen to God's people? Isn't being a Christian some kind of an insulation? Shouldn't we expect that, if God's on our side, those kinda things aren't gonna happen in our lives? What is God's purpose in all of that, and why is it happening, and how are we to view that?"

Those are very important questions. People asked me that when, a few years ago, Patricia broke her neck, and they told me she didn't have much of a chance to live. And...and people were saying, "What do you think the Lord is gonna teach you through this?" Well, we all face that in life. We all face that. That's just the way it is. Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward. The Bible says, "As sure as sparks go up off of fire, trouble's gonna come." We all understand that. We know

that. The longer we live, the more of that we accumulate.

And I...it's very important for us to get a perspective on that, and...and answer the question, "What is God doing?" And so I wanna do that this morning. And, in order to do that, I want you to open your Bible to Hebrews chapter 12. I wanna go to the Word of God this morning. Hebrews chapter 12, and to what must be for many Christians a very familiar portion of Scripture that speaks directly to this issue, I think. Now, I confess to you that the passage is...is so important, and the issue is so important that I can't cover it all this morning. I'm gonna give you an introduction this morning, and I think it'll be a very helpful one. I trust it will be. And then next week, we'll look more tightly to the text itself.

But I wanna read the text to you, and it really begins in verse 5...Hebrews chapter 12 verse 5. The writer of Hebrews says this: "And have you forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline or the training or the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.' It is for discipline or chastening that you endure. God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits...that's God...and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

Now this is really very foundational for us to understand the issues of life. And since life is filled with trouble, this passage answers what is a very profound and important question. Why do bad things happen to God's people?

Now lemme get a little bit of a running start here. This book is addressed to Hebrews, that is to Jews. A community of Jews that constituted a church. They had come to understand the Gospel. The Messiah had come and had died and...and risen from the dead. And they had believed that, and the church began. No sooner did the church begin than persecution followed. After all, they came out of a Jewish background. They would've been un-synagogued. They would've been put out of their synagogue. They would've been alienated from family, alienated from friends. If they were employed by Jewish employers, they would've lost their job. They might have lost the normal issues of life in terms of where you go and what you buy and who you interact with. Because if those were Jewish contacts, they would've been isolated. They might even have...have suffered some other forms of persecution and alienation.

And so these people in this community of Jewish believers are starting to feel the heat of what it means to identify with Jesus Christ. And the writer of Hebrews wants to put a perspective on that. He wants them to understand that there's a process going on here, and it's not one that should surprise them. It's really an age-old process. In fact, back in chapter 11, he talked about heroes of faith. And the writer of Hebrews sorta gets a running start into the 12th chapter, and he reminds them about Jewish and even pre-Jewish people, all the way back to the time of Adam and his son, Abel. He talks about Abel's faith and Enoch's faith and Noah's faith. And then the Jews began with Abraham. Abraham's faith and Sarah's faith, and it keeps coming down to verse 20, Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Moses and down to even a harlot by the name of Rahab, who was a Gentile. And then others among the Jews, verse 32, Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets. All of these are people of faith. All of this is sort of like the hall of fame here in chapter 11. all the great heroes of faith. Those who believed God.

And...and in every single case where they believed God, they suffered the condemnation of the world. In every case, when they took a position on the side of God and His truth and His Word and His person, they suffered some condemnation from the world in various ways. It's all summed up starting in verse 33. This group of people "conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions...particularly in Daniel's case...quenched the power of fire." In other words, they were burned like the three friends of Daniel, "escaped the edge of the sword, they were made strong in their weakness. They became mighty in war. They put armies to flight." Some of them literally were killed and experienced the resurrection. They were tortured. It says in verse 36, "They experienced mockings, scourgings, chains, imprisonments... verse 37...they were stoned. They were sawn in half. They were tempted. They were put to death with the sword. They went about in sheepskins, in goatskins." Apparently wrapped in those kinds of skins, they would...they would attract, by the scent of those skins, some wild animal that would then eat them. "They were destitute, afflicted, ill-treated. They wandered...verse 38...in deserts, mountains, caves, holes." Welcome to the family of faith, folks. Anybody wanna sign up?

I mean that was the point. When you enter into the family of God, you're gonna receive the condemnation of the world to one degree or another. He's just reminding them of that. He's just saying, "Look, this is kind of how it is." And in chapter 12, verse 1, he says, "Now, we have this great cloud of witnesses, this...this...this pe...this group of people I've just identified, and they are witnesses to the validity of the life of faith in spite of its difficulties."

That brings us down to...to verse 5, and he identifies what this is. From the standpoint of the world, it's persecution. From the standpoint of the person who is suffering, it is pain. But from the standpoint of God, in verse 5, it is called the discipline of the Lord. The discipline of the Lord. And he's saying to them, "You're not the only people to go through this. In fact, you're not the first people to go through this. This kinda goes with the territory." Some of the people in this congregation, we know from reading the book of Hebrews, were genuinely converted to Christ. They had genuinely

embraced Him as Messiah. They were true Christians. But they were feeling the pressure of this persecution and alienation, this condemnation by the...the world that they were formerly a part of. And it was pushing them back toward Judaism, and some of them were...were tending to sort of renounce Christ and go back. Others of them were sitting on the fence, sort of teetering on the edge, believing the Gospel was true but afraid to embrace it for fear of the fact that they, too, would be alienated.

The Lord doesn't take away the prospect of persecution. The Lord doesn't say it's gonna be mitigated somehow. He just defines it. From the world's view, it's persecution. From your view, it's pain. From God's view, it's discipline. And we wanna understand it from God's view, don't we? I mean that is the way to understand it. So the phrase that I want you to grasp in this text is in verse 5, right there kind of in the middle of the verse: The discipline of the Lord. The discipline of the Lord.

We wanna understand the issues of life from God's perspective. We want to understand them from His viewpoint. And this is where we learn about His discipline. Lemme talk about the word discipline. Do some of your Bibles say chastening? I'm sure they do. Lemme...lemme give you that word. It's the word pedaya. Pedaya. It is the word from which get, for example, pedagogy, which basically is a form of educating children. It's a word that means to educate. And pedagogy would be to educate children. It's the word from which you get the medical term pediatric, pedo, which is the original Greek term for children.

It is not a word loaded with negative connotation. The word chastening sounds pretty negative. It almost vicious. It certainly sounds like a synonym for punishment. But the actual Greek word, pedaya, is a very broad word, and that's why the translators in the New American Standard that I'm reading translated it discipline, because it embraces both the positive and the negative, not just the negative. It's a broad word. It basically means to train children. And training children is a combination, isn't it? A balance of the positive input - showing them truth and virtue and character - and, on the other hand, giving them enough pain to cause them to be redirected away from things that are bad for them, things that are wicked, things that are evil, things that are destructive, so that they associate those things with pain. They understand there's a price to pay for those, and they don't wanna pay the price, thus they avoid it.

But the word pedaya or chastening or discipline, I suppose we could sum it up by saying refers to whatever efforts are made toward children to cultivate their soul. Whatever efforts are made toward children to cultivate their soul. That would involve teaching them truth and virtue. That would involve correcting mistakes and curbing passions. That's what the word basically means. What...whatever effort is made toward children to cultivate their soul, and that would involve teaching them truth and virtue, correcting mistakes, and curbing passions. It would have a positive aspect and a negative aspect. It would include instruction, and it would include punishment. Includes all of that. It does not have the idea only of punishment. It does not have the idea only of corrective measures which are

designed to eliminate evil in the life and encourage what is good. It has also the idea of instruction with what is right. It is the full-orbed term parents should use in the process of rearing their children. A loving parent disciplines, trains, rears his child, both to love what is right and to hate what is evil.

Now, the Lord is doing this in our lives. The writer of Hebrews is saying, "You have to look at all of this from God's perspective and see it as training." And see it as training. I mean it would be not unlike any kind of rigorous training. Training for those people who have to do rigorous tasks in the military. Training for those who have to do rigorous tasks in an athletic endeavor. Training for those who have to do rigorous tasks such as going into space. We've all been aware of that this week. Any of those kinds of things involve positive input and also warnings of what would violate and become destructive. And that's how training is. It's a positive and negative balance.

Now, in the training that the Lord brings into our lives, there are several reasons that He does that. I had three when I got here this morning. I thought of another one in the early service, and I'm gonna include it. That's always kinda fun, you know, when just kinda pops in there. But I wanna show you four reasons...why the discipline of the Lord occurs in your life as a Christian. Four reasons.

Now before I look at those four reasons, I...I wanna make a...a sort of a very clear distinction here. There must be a sharp distinction made between divine punishment and divine discipline. All right? Between divine punishment and divine discipline. Let me say this as clearly as I can. God's people can never be punished for their sins in the full sense, in the judicial sense, because God has already punished Christ fully for our sins. Right? He bore His own body our sins on the cross. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us. He paid the penalty in full and, therefore, Romans 8:1 says that we are under no condemnation and never will be.

So when we're talking about divine punishment or divine chastening or divine discipline, we're not talking about that judicial punishment of our sins which relates to our salvation. We're talking about a discipline and a chastening and a punishment that relates to our sanctification. God has already punished Christ for all our sins which takes care of our eternity. But God has to punish us for our sins here in time in this world to conform us more and more to holiness and righteousness which is to bring us into greater blessing and usefulness.

Those are two things you have to keep distinct. The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, has cleansed us from all sin in a judicial sense. Our sins are paid for. They're completely covered. And neither the justice of God, because it's already been fully satisfied by Christ bearing our sins, nor the love of God will ever permit Him to again exact payment for what Christ has already paid for. You mark that out?

So when you are chastened and when you are punished by God for sins in this life, it is not because Jesus somehow didn't bear all the punishment for your sins. It is not related to your justification, that is your standing before God. That was accomplished in Christ. It's related to your sanctification.

That is your personal righteousness, so that you can enjoy His blessings and be useful to him...

That distinction needs to be made. To put it another way, in...in...in punishment related to our salvation, God is judge. In discipline related to our sanctification, God is a loving Father. In punishment related to our salvation, the objects are sins to be punished, the price to be paid. In discipline, the object really is holiness, to conform the believer to purity. In punishment, condemnation is the goal. In discipline, righteousness is the goal...

Now, let's look at four reasons why the discipline of the Lord happens in our lives. And I...and I wanna tell you before we go into this, this is a very personal thing for most part. A very personal thing. And even at...that is to say I can't look at you and say, "Oh, I know why the Lord's doing that to you," unless I know something flagrant about you, and I'll point that out. But, in many cases, this is something you have to deal with in your own heart. And sometimes, while certainly not clear to everybody around you, it may not even be too clear to you, as we'll see. But these are the reasons that we have to work through in understanding the discipline of the Lord.

Reason number one, retribution. We'll use the word retribution. It means...means punishment. Retribution. The first reason the Lord would discipline you like a father would discipline a child is because you've sinned. And sin is bad for you. Sin harms you. Sin can devastate your life. It can render you useless in the service of God. It can forfeit God's blessing. Takes away your joy, your peace, produces shame, guilt, worry, fear, anxiety. And a loving father doesn't want you to have that. As a loving father punishes a child, not to hurt the child, but to help the child, punishes the child, not to produce long-term pain, but short-term pain and long-term correction, so God punishes sin in the life of a believer for positive purposes. We have sinned, and we need to be dealt with. That's one of the reasons we get disciplined.

And, frankly, when you're gonna work your way through these things, you...you're...you're strugg...struggles are going on in your life. Maybe you've been told you have cancer. You have a disease. Maybe you're struggling in your marriage. Maybe you're...you're fighting off the pain of a partner who left you, and...and maybe left you with a child. Maybe your...your marriage partner had an affair with somebody. Maybe...maybe you were planning to marry somebody, and she turned away from you, and you're in the forlorn situation of having unrequited love. Maybe you're struggling with a death in the family. I don't know what it is. All of those kinds of things, and you start to take a look at why is this happening to me. You start with this. You start with this: "Look into my own heart. Look into my own life. Is there sin there? Could this be corrective in my life? Could it be that a loving Father is trying to show such consequence in my life as a result of my sin pattern that I need to correct that?"

Now that was the case with David. Remember the great king of Israel David? A remarkable man. Credible man. Very brilliant. A song writer, a sweet singer, a harpist, a great leader, a noble king. A

man who had gained not only the esteem of his people, but he had been the man that God had identified to be the king of His theocratic Kingdom, the nation Israel. David had everything a man could ever had...he...have. He...he had it all. Sitting in his palace one day. His palace was higher than the rest of the houses around him. He looked out and saw a woman sunbathing on the roof of her house, and he desired that woman. Her name was Bathsheba. The story, of course, is known to everybody. He...he worked out a way in which he could get that woman. Came together with that woman. Actually, she became pregnant as a result of that union, so he committed adultery, violated his own marriage, his own vows to his own wife, violated the nation, violated his role as a king. And more than that, he worked it out so her husband, who was one of his most dedicated soldiers, fighting a battle on the behalf of great King David would be put in a place in the battle where he would be compromised, left alone, so the...to the will of the enemy. And Uriah became the victim of the plotting of David, so that he was actually killed in battle. David was responsible, not only for adultery, but murder. Murder...

And then the floodgates of chastening opened up. And the Bible says about David the most amazing thing. God said to David, "The sword will never leave your house. Never. You're gonna need to learn that you can't conduct yourself like that and expect no consequences. There will be consequences to that behavior that'll go on through your life." The first consequence that came immediately was the baby died. The child of Bathsheba died. And you remember David bemoaned that. And in his sorrow, he...he...he made a pensive statement. He said, "He cannot come to me, but I shall go to him," which was full of hope. He...he knew that little baby, that little innocent life was in the presence of God. That was a little bit of God's grace extended, of course, to him, even though that was an illegitimate child. God does take care of all little ones.

But David mourned the loss of that baby. As if that wasn't bad enough, coup after coup after coup came against David, and the sword really never went out of his house. And the worst of all, the coups was the one led by his own son, Absalom. Absalom tried to overthrow his father and take his throne. And Absalom eventually...was riding fast through the forest and killed himself when he ran into a tree. And, as you know, he was hanged there. And David cried, "Oh, Absalom, Absalom, my son, my son, my son." David suffered the terrible pangs of guilt. It says in Psalm 32 that David said, "My life juices are dried up." It affected his blood flow. It affected his saliva. It afflicted his...affected his nervous system. His whole body convulsed in the anxiety produced by the guilt and the shame and the sorrow of his sin. His...his tongue was stuck to the roof of his mouth. And as long as he didn't confess his sin, he...he suffered through all that agony. His whole body ached from head to toe. Finally, he burs forth in confession. Psalm 51, he writes a similar psalm and cries out to God against Whom he has sinned in penitence. He got the message. He...he really got the message. He became a faithful and a righteous man. He became the friend of God. He...he wrote more psalms than anybody else. He became the sweet singer of Israel. He became a man after God's own heart. But it took some tremendous and immense correction.

And that's where, whenever something happens in your life, that's where you have to start. I mean that's the right place to start, isn't it? Take that self-examination. Is there some sin in my life? Remember Job? I mean talk about having it tough. Job is a very wealthy man, one of the wealthiest men in the East. He lives during the time of the patriarchs, time of Genesis. Job may be the first Bible book in terms of...of writing. Maybe even have been written before the penitence, Genesis. Talking about men in...in the patriarchal times. One of them was Job. Very wealthy, lots of land, lot of crops, lots of animals, and lots of children and one wife. And all of a sudden, everything goes. He loses it all. Loses absolutely everything. Loses all his crops, loses all his animals, loses all his children. The only thing left is his wife, and she is just cantankerous and adds to his pain...

He lost it all. And then he lost his health...and he's sitting in a pile of ashes scraping scabs off with a broken piece of pottery to sort of relieve his misery. And the question comes to his mind. This is a man of faith. This is a man who believes in the true and living God. This is a man who has served God with his whole heart. This is a man who's been absolutely obedient and faithful. This is the good man. This is the best of men at the time. How do you know that? Because in Job 1 and 2, Satan went to heaven. And Satan says to God, "Look, God, You don't have anybody who's faithful to You if You don't give 'em all kinds of riches. If You don't bless 'em and pour out all this stuff on 'em, they're gonna curse You."

And He says, "That's not true." God says, "No, it isn't, and I'll show you. There's Job. He's a man of faith. He's a righteous man. He's very wealthy. I'll let you go and take away everything he has but his life, everything away but his life. And his faith will not fail."

Well, Job didn't know that. Job never read the first two chapters of the book that bears his name. It wasn't written till long after he was gone. He didn't have a clue. He never knew what was going on up in heaven. He didn't know God and Satan were...were trying to make a point. He's just down here, and everything has gone wrong in his life. He doesn't know. So the first thing he does is look at his heart. He does a self-examination. He comes out, and he says, "Look, God, I think everything's okay. I've confessed my sin. I'm...I'm...I'm working through the issues of my life. I...I wanna serve You. I love You. I'm...I'm trying to be a...a good man, an obedient man, and I don't know of any sin in my life that I'm hanging onto. God, I...I think everything's okay." And he's sorta scratching his head. So he has some of his friends come over, and they feel so sorry for the guy. The guy's absolutely in desperation. And it says, "For seven days, they did nothing but sit in silence." His friends. Three friends just sat there in dead silence. Just commiserating. Just sympathizing. Just probably going, "Ohhhhh," you know, just "Mmmmmmm."

At the end of seven days, they broke their silence. And as soon as they opened their mouth, all wisdom left...The first thing they said was, "Oh, Job, you gotta lotta sin in your life. We know. We have a good theology. Our theology is if you got problems, you got sin."...Well, sometimes. But Job

said, "No, I don't." They said, "Well, you better check again."

So his friends add to his pain, because they keep accusing him of something that isn't true. And so, literally, they ran that man...they ran that man through weeks of personal inventory. And they came up with nothing...It wasn't that he was sinless. It was that he wasn't holding out some sin. He was willingly yielding his life to the Lord...He wasn't like David. David did inventory, and he knew he sinned...When a believer is smarting under the rod you might have to say, "I mu...I brought this upon myself. God is correcting me in love. He's not smiting me in wrath. He's correcting me in love."...

That's where you start. Retribution...And David knew it the rest of his life. Never went away...But don't get stuck there. When you do that inventory, you gotta move on. Let's go to a second reason why God disciplines us. Prevention. Prevention. You know, as a father, obviously, in dealing with the children we raised, Patricia and I were concerned about retribution. We didn't spare the rod. We spanked the children and punished the children when we thought it was appropriate for their well-being. But we were also very concerned about prevention. That is to say, we wanted to build some walls around our children to protect them from what could potentially harm them. We wanted to wall them off. There...there were certain things we didn't allow them to do. There were certain places we didn't allow them to go. There were certain people we didn't allow them to fellowship with...

And the children would see that as a hardship. Did you ever have your children say to you, "Why not? Everybody else is." Boy, I heard that one. "Oh, come on, Dad, so and so's gonna do it, and so and so's gonna do it. Why can't I do it?" I mean even down to never stepping off a curb, 'cause we lived on a busy street, and it was just...it was just preventative care and protection of the children to say, "Don't ever step off that curb." And, occasionally, when they were little and stepped off the curb, they got spanked. And so you could see them run full speed and just come to a grinding halt when they hit a curb. It was almost like this was, you know, they would...they would know they were truly liberated when...in life, when they were old enough to step off a curb. You know, that was sort of like... that was sort of like the adult rite of passage, you know?

But you do that, because you care, right? You do that because you love your children. And that's preventative. The Apostle Paul knew that. As David is an illustration of God's discipline for retribution, Paul is an illustration of God's discipline for prevention. I don't find anywhere in the New Testament, and I...I pretty well have searched the Scriptures with regard to Paul. I don't find anywhere where we see God...bringing some punishment into Paul's life for some sin that he harbored. Oh, he wasn't perfect...but he...but he really did deal with the sin issues in his life. But...but he suffered. He suffered.

I mean we saw it, didn't we, in 2 Corinthians. He was beaten. He was shipwrecked. He was...he was beaten with whips by the Jewish leaders, and he was beaten with rods by the...the...the Romans, and he was stoned and left for dead. And he was hated and despised, and he was thrown out of

town, and he started riots, and they tried to kill him, and...and you know all that. Was that for sin?

In 2 Corinthians 12 verse 7, Paul says this. "That God gave me a thorn in the flesh." He uses the word for a stake, like a spear. "God literally rammed a spear through my flesh." That's very painful. "God impaled me," if you will. "God gave me immense pain." And...and it tells why in that verse, 2 Corinthians 12:7, it says, "To keep me from...you remember it?...exalting myself." Hummm, now, that's not retribution. That's prevention. God brings things into our lives to prevent us from the sin of pride. You get to feeling self-sufficient. You get to feeling almost omnipotent, able to control everything in your world. And God'll bring something into your life just to humble you. Just to prevent you from being overly proud. After all, Paul had had many visions, many revelations, he says, in that chapter. He had even gone to heaven. You remember? He was caught up in the third heaven. Saw things he couldn't talk about, and things that he really couldn't explain. He was forbidden to speak. It was an incredible thing that God allowed him to see. He had numerous occasions after the ascension of Jesus Christ and after his conversion, seeing the ascended Christ, Who appeared to him on the Damascus road and...and several other times.

And Paul says, "Because of those revelations which could make me proud, the Lord had to bring pain and suffering into my life in order to humiliate me." And I think sometimes you gotta go there. After you've looked at the retribution issue, you gotta look at the prevention issue, and you gotta ask yourself, "Is the Lord just trying to make me remember that I don't have another breath unless He gives it to me?...Do I need to be reminded of the fact that I'm not in control of my life? I'm not the master of my fate. I'm not the captain of my destiny. I don't call the shots. It's God who gives me the right to live. In Him I live and move and have my being. Do I need to be reminded that in the truth I'm nothing?"

And, as Paul learned, "When I'm weak, then I'm strong, and His power is perfected in my weakness. When I've come to the end of myself, when I have nowhere to turn, and I cast myself on the mercy of God, then I'm just the kind of person that I need to be." I...I really do believe God brings those strictures into our lives. God brings discipline and...and difficulty into our lives and trouble and trauma to keep us from feeling that...that prideful sort of invincibility that we can easily gain...He wants to make us feel dependent on Him. He wants to protect us. And...and I think the Lord sometimes just brings in discipline to wall us off from something we might otherwise have done that would've been against His will. Who knows what ways He protects His children? Who knows? He knows. We don't know.

And, Paul, you know, in 2 Corinthians 12, he said, "I prayed three times for the Lord to take that spear out of my body, to remove that pain, and three times the Lord said, "No, because you need to be humbled." Three times the Lord said, "It's better for you to have this in your life, because it'll prevent you from being proud and thereby being useful and forfeiting blessing."

So all through Paul's whole life, I mean from the time of the Damascus road where he became a preacher of the Gospel until his head was chopped off in Rome by a Roman soldier. He was executed. All through his whole entire life and ministry, he suffered, didn't he? And I think all that suffering was not...it's not...it's not designated in the New Testament as some kind of retribution for this man's sins. It is more often defined as some kind of prevention...It kept him humble, who otherwise would've been very proud. And he was, remember, prior to his conversion, a very, very proud man, wasn't he?...

There's a third...purpose in God's discipline, not unlike a human father, and that's education. Retribution is...is one. Prevention is two, and education is three...How can I say this in...in a way that you'll understand it? I really believe that if you don't suffer in...in...in the vicissitudes of life, you're not gonna experience God. There...there are tremendous lessons to be learned. You can read the Bible, and it says certain things. You know, that when you go through the valley of the shadow of death, you know, I'll be the good shepherd, and I'll be there, and that's all fine. That's words on paper, and we believed 'em in our minds. But it's not until you go through the valley of the shadow of death that that's personalized, right?

If you've been in the valley and death has cast its shadow over you and you've come through and out the other side into the sunlight, you can read the 23 Psalm, and it's not just words on a page. All of a sudden, it grips your heart, because you've been there. If you say...the Bible says, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in Christ Jesus," and you're like William Carey, and you're sitting out in India, and you've got a...a sick wife, and you've got three little sick boys, and you're sitting in India with nothing to eat and no money, and you're...you're pleading with God to provide the next meal. And God sustains you, and you never miss a meal in 35 years of missionary work. And somebody says to you, "My God shall supply all your needs," is that theology or is that experience?...

If you never have that experience, then that theology never grips your soul...And when you go in and you find your little baby has died of crib death, and that precious little treasure is blue, and...and you know the life is gone...then you're gonna find out whether God is able, aren't you? Then you're gonna find out whether God can give you peace that passes all understanding. Peace for which there is no human explanation. Whether God can turn your sorrow into joy. Whether God is enough...

If you ask a couple that's never had that experience, "Do you think God is sufficient?" They'll smile and say, "The Bible says He's sufficient. I believe He's sufficient." You ask the couple that lost the baby, "Is God sufficient?" And they say, "The Bible says that, and I have experienced His sufficiency." And one of the reasons that God takes us through these issues in life is so that we may experience His sufficiency. And the great illustration of that is back to our friend Job...

Job's down here on earth, and everything has gone wrong. And his friends give him such stupid advice, and he can't get any advice out of anybody that's worth anything. And his wife just says, "Curse God and die." That's no help...They're telling him he's the problem. She's telling him God's the problem...No answer, and God never tells him what on. He never knows in his whole...he never knew till he got to heaven. He didn't know what was going on. He didn't know why it was happening. But you know what? He lost everything. All his children, everything. He lost everything. And eventually he lost all his friends, because they got sick of telling him stuff that he didn't listen to. He was absolutely all alone. Everybody was on the other side. His wife, his friends, everybody. He was absolutely alone. And he never knew why this stuff was happening to him...

And, you know, I just remind you...that...it's not up to you to know why it's happening...It's just enough up to you to...it's up to you to know who it is that cares enough about you to be doing it. I mean we may never know why in every case. Oh, you may if you go through the retribution. You see a sin your life. You...it may be prevention, but you may not know all of that, 'cause you may not know what the Lord is preventing, since it's prevented...You may not know.

But what did Job learn? There was never a time when God said, "By the way, Job, I'll tell you what's going on. I had this conversation with Satan, and...and I'm doing this to make a point to him." He never told Job that. Never. Never...

Finally, in the end, you know what he does say to Job? "Shut up, Job, don't ask anymore questions. Who are you? Who are you? Were you around when I created the world? Who are you? Just be quiet...Don't say anything." And Job apologizes for his questionings. And then this is the...this is the cap. At the end of the book, at the end of story of Job, which is so incredible, Job says this. And here is the great lessons of the book of Job. Job looks at God and he says, "I don't know anymore now than I knew when it started...except I know this - I had heard of You with the hearing of my ears." There wasn't any written Scripture at the time. He says, "I heard about You, God. Who You are was told to me. What You are like was told to me. I heard that You were the true and the living God, the Creator of heaven and earth and all that is in them. I heard about You, that You were a God of righteousness, that You were a God of mercy and justice and all those things. I heard of that with the hearing of my ear." Then he says this, "But now my eye sees You."...

What happened to Job? A personal, private education. He was tutored by God. Is God able to sustain a man when he loses everything he has? Job will give you an answer. What's his answer? Yes. Is God able to allow you to overcome the bad advice of your friends and misdiagnosis of your problem? Yes. Is God enough when you're sitting there with a terribly painful, excruciating disease that goes on and on and on and on without relief? Is God enough? Is there still a place for peace and joy and trust and confidence in your heart? And Job's answer is yes, and he never, ever would have known that if he hadn't experienced it. And in the end, he says, "I repent in dust and ashes.

God, forgive me for ever questioning." And you know what he was saying? "I didn't like the trip, but the end is worth the trip. The end is worth the exercise. In this sense, I now know God personally. You ask me, could God sustain you in the losses of life? Can God sustain you when you're children die? Can God sustain you when your wife turns against you? Can God sustain you when you lose everything, including your friends? Can God sustain you when you become embarrassed, when you become a laughingstock, when you're mortified to even be seen by anybody because of the horrors of your condition? Can God sustain you through that?...Answer...I know see You, God, in a way I never, ever knew You before."

And that's what we said earlier, isn't it? If you don't go through those times, you don't know God can sustain you...And he also had a new sympathy for others, Job did. And Paul says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 1 when he says, "God brought me through all my suffering in order that I might be able to teach you how to suffer. So I became educated, so I can help you." But the real education is in the pain itself...If you've never gone through a frightening, extensive, life-threatening heart surgery or cancer surgery of some kind, then you've never been able to experience the peace that you know the Bible promises, but you've never experienced it. You talk to somebody who goes in and comes out of that and can rejoice in the very personalized theology, God who stood by them and granted them what He pledges in the Scripture to grant.

That's part of the discipline of the Lord. You know He's there. You know He's able. That's part of the training that He wants to do in your life. And Job is an illustration of that. As Paul was an illustration of prevention. As David was an illustration of retribution...

I told you I've been reading this biography of William Carey, which has captivated my mind. Thinking about going to India as a missionary. It's just incredible. The story...listen to this. William Carey is...goes to India. He's a third-grade education. He's a shoe...he's a cobbler. He repairs shoes in England. He's at the low, low rung, you know, on the social ladder. He goes to India where, of course, he's...he runs right into a caste system, and he's even lower than the lowest caste, because he's not Indian. He goes to India and has terrible difficulty there, but he decides he's gonna translate the Bible. Before he's done, 34 years later, he's translated the Bible into 18 languages, none of which he knew when he got there.

He became the greatest living scholar in Sanskrit, because Sanskrit's the basic language for all those other Indian languages and dialects, as Latin would be for the Romance languages. So he works for years and years and years, and translates the Bible into Sanskrit, and then out of Sanskrit into all these languages. And then he decides that if he's gonna get the Word of God out, he has to build a printing operation. So they get a printer named Marshman from England. He comes over, and they build this printing operation. They bring in all these reams of paper that they...very difficult to get. They got the print, prints, the presses rolling. They've made the type out of lead now, and...and they've got it all set up in all these various languages. And they're characters, not just English letters,

so it's a very arduous task to do all of this in all these languages.

And they're starting to spread the Word of God everywhere. They build this big printing operation. They got, I don't know, up to 200 people working there, and the thing is going great, and the Lord has made it all happen. And inside the building are many of the original translation sheets that he's worked on. His original translation work. It's all in there. And one night fire comes and burns the entire thing to the ground. And all the letters of lead melt, and all his life's work, original copies of all of that, are gone forever. Irreplaceable...

Now, how, what...what are you gonna do in reaction to that? It's like a Job experience, isn't it? You know what they did? They all got together, and they praised God, because they were about to see God put Himself on display...You ask William Carey, "Why did that happen?" He says, "I don't know. Maybe God had a conversation with Satan, and He's trying to prove the point again. I don't know." He doesn't know. To the end he didn't know why, and who would know why that happened? Why would God, Who could prevent such a thing allow such a thing? But in the end, it worked out to the furtherance of things. When they began to put it all back together again, within a year, it was at full operation, and they were printing Bibles and sending them everywhere. Every missionary whose ever gone anyplace in the world over there is dependent upon those guys' work. Worked around William Carey, but all I know is they all got together and had a praise service, because they were about to see the hand of their God on display. And they saw God do things that, if they hadn't had the fire, they never would've seen Him do, which was a tremendous education knowing their God.

Fourth point...This is the one I just thought of this morning, but it's...it's important. Anticipation. Anticipation. I think you'll understand this. Sometimes the Lord brings...brings discipline into our lives just to loosen us up from the planet, and to increase our anticipation of heaven...You know, the more you go through in this life and the...the...the sweeter heaven becomes. I...I wrote a book on heaven. No teenager bought it...Teenagers aren't ready to go to heaven. They wanna get married, and they wanna do their thing, and, but...but us older folk, we bought it. We're ready. You know who...you know who buys a book heaven?...People who are ill and anticipating heaven. People who are older and...really understand that heaven isn't down here, and they're anxious to go. And people who have people they love already there.

That was John in Revelation. He's the illustration of anticipation. He's preaching the Gospel, and they throw him out...of the church. They take him on a ship, and they haul him over to a place called Patmos, which is a rock. I mean I've been there. It's a rock in the Mediterranean Sea. It's just a rock, and not a very large rock. And it was a place where they exiled prisoners. It was a prison. And they did some, you know, rock crushing and some...some work there. And he was there as a prisoner on the Isle Patmos. And he was there suffering. It was a great suffering.

And when he was there, things weren't going well. It was in the mid-'90s of the first...the first century...The church was floundering and weak. There were seven churches in Asia where John was. Five of 'em were rife with sin. His heart was really discouraged. Persecution everywhere. Christians being killed. The apostles had been martyred. It wasn't going very well. It didn't look like they were gonna conquer the world with this Christian message. And now John's sitting on a rock as a prisoner. It's really tough...

And in chapter 4, what does the Lord do? He speaks from heaven, and He says, "Come up here, John. I wanna show you what you have to look forward to." And any persecuted group of believers understands that. Certainly the Hebrews would've. That's anticipation. And, you know, at the end of the book of Revelation, after God unfolds all this stuff that's true of heaven and all that's gonna come out of heaven onto this earth in the end of the age, John, at the end of...of the book of Revelation sums everything up. Jesus says, "I'm coming quickly." What's John's response? "Amen. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. Get me outta here."

Anticipa...I think that...I think as you go through life and you accumulate all the struggles and the vicissitudes and the issues and sorrows and pains of life, heaven becomes all the sweeter, doesn't it? And we, according to Romans 8, "Wait for the redemption of the body." And 1 Corinthians 15, "We...we long for this perishable to put on imperishable, for this mortal to put on immortality, for...for death or this dying process to be swallowed up by life."...That's anticipation.

So when bad things happen to good people, it may be retribution. It may be prevention. It may be education. It may have no other purpose than to...to get you where Job was, to be able to say, "God, I knew about You intellectually. But now I...I know You intimately, personally. I knew about You print on a page in a Bible. And now I know You because You've touched my life intimately in the process of this sorrow." And it may be anticipation. It may be just to loosen you up down here. It may be just to...to get your feet off the ground a little bit and have you to anticipate the glory which is to come...

You say, "How do I know all those things?" Well, where did I get 'em all?...Where'd I get all that? Where...where does the story of David come from? The story of Job come from? Story of Paul come from? The story of John? All comes out of the Scripture. Look back at the text, and we'll close with this, in Hebrews 12 verse 5. He says, "If you don't take suffering this way, if you don't accept the fact that God is disciplining you...he says this...You have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons...He says...Look, have you forgotten the exhortation?" And what is the exhortation? He says it. "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint you are reproved by Him." Where did he get that? Proverbs 3:11. Proverbs 3:11. He wants the reader to remember the words of Proverbs 3:11. "Have you forgotten what the Bible says?"...he said...If you wanna view your troubles from God's viewpoint, you gotta look at Scripture. If you look at your trouble from the standpoint of the world around you, you could say, "Well, it's persecution or it's germs or it was that accident. That car hit me and that person did it to me." Or...or whatever. If you look at it from your

own viewpoint, "It's my pain. It's my sorrow." If you wanna see it from God's viewpoint, you go to the Scripture.

So he says, "Look...you gotta go back, because you have forgotten what the Scripture said, and the Scripture said that you're gonna be disciplined. Don't think of it lightly, and don't faint when it comes, because God is at work." Notice, this is so wonderful. The writer's appeal is to the Word of God, and the Bible is final authority. It's the court of appeal for every issue...When you want instruction and you wanna understand life and you wanna understand its good and bad elements, you go to the Word of God...

There's a verse I love in Romans 15:14. It says this: "Whatever things were written before...that's the Old Testament...whatever was written before was written for our learning. Whatever is written in the Scripture is for our learning, that we, through endurance and comfort, from the Scriptures might have hope." Boy, what a great statement. You wanna be able to endure through your suffering? You wanna be able to have comfort through your suffering and maintain your hope? Through the Scriptures. So you turn to the Scripture for hope. Turn to the Scripture for endurance. You turn to the Scripture...for comfort...because the Scripture speaks.

Look at verse 5. "It is addressed to you, as sons." I don't know if you view the Bible that way. I don't...I don't view the...the...the Bible as a...a sort of a book just thrown down here for whoever. I...I really read this book in a very personal way. I hope you do. I...I see this book as God's gift to me. I...I see this book as addressed to me as His son, as His child. It speaks to me. It's for me, so that I can interpret the issues of life...

And he says to these Jewish believers, he says, "Have you forgotten the Scripture?" You go back, you'll find their endurance, you'll find their comfort, and you'll find their hope, because you'll find their instruction as we've given you this morning about what God is doing through this. And it's all for your good and your glory ultimately in eternity.

Well, that's the introduction. Next Sunday, we'll get into the message...Pray with me.

Father, how...how wonderful it is to have a...a rock to stand on, an anchor for our souls in Your truth. We just grieve over those people who go through all the sufferings of life just...losing people in death and in accidents and suffering the trauma of...of broken love and...lost children and divorce and the devastating results of sin and all the sadness and all the sorrow that fills the world. And they just have nowhere to go. They have nowhere to turn. It's just a mystery. It's just darkness. It's just pain...and sometimes they strike out in vengeance trying to...trying to somehow alleviate the suffering. But it just doesn't come. And then, Lord, we just grieve over such people, and we can only pray that they would come to the knowledge of the truth, to know You...We thank You, Lord, that we know You and...and that when we see things happening, we don't see them from a human viewpoint.

Not someone else's and not ours. We...we look at them from Your viewpoint. And so we embrace the suffering of life. We embrace the pain of life for its retributive effect on us as it chastens our sins and...brings us pain that causes us to want to avoid...any of that in the future. It drives us back toward righteousness. And we thank You for that suffering in our lives that prevents us from being proud and self-sufficient and self-confident. For that part which educates us in the...in the personal dimension as You come to us in our pain, and You provide all we need, and You sustain us. And we know You in personal intimate ways that we would never know apart from that. We thank You for the way in which our suffering causes our hearts to reach out to the glory which is to come, the wonders of heaven. To know that we will live there with no sorrow, no suffering, no tears, no crying, and no death forever. In fullness of joy...in Your presence. How we long for that. And, Lord, we are but unworthy sinners who have been graced with this blessing of being Your children...and receiving Your loving discipline. Thank You for it. We know You bring it out of love, for all the right reasons, to accomplish Your purpose in our life. That which will produce in us the greatest usefulness to You and the greatest joy and fulfillment for us. Just as we do our own children, You bring us discipline out of love, and we thank You. In Christ's name. Amen.

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