

The Author and Finisher of Our Faith

Heb 12:1-13

SS Lesson for 10/30/2016

Devotional Scripture: Prov 23:12-19

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson describes how Jesus is **The Author and Finisher of Our Faith**. The study's aim is to recognize the role of discipline or chastening in our spiritual development. The study's application is to focus on the Lord to avoid the need for chastening but to benefit and accept the discipline the Lord gives us as part of our sanctification.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Heb 12:1-2

1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

The author concluded the basic argument of the epistle with a final admonition and warning. As usual his hortatory section grew directly out of the expository one which preceded it. His discussion of the life of faith now led to another call for perseverance.

12:1-2. The life of faith has been amply attested by this **great cloud of Old Testament witnesses**. (This does not mean that they watch believers today.) Hence believers ought to **run with perseverance** (*hypomonēs*; cf. 10:32, 36; 12:2-3,7) **the race marked out** in their Christian lives, setting aside whatever **hinders and the sin that so easily entangles** (*euperistaton*, “ambushes or encircles”). Their supreme Model for this continued to be **Jesus**, however admirable any Old Testament figure might be. He is both **the Author and Perfecter of our faith**. The word “author” (*archēgon*) was used in 2:10 (see comments there) and suggests that Jesus “pioneered” the path of faith Christians should follow. He also “perfected” the way of faith since He reached its end successfully. He kept His eye on **the joy set before Him**, the “joy” alluded to in 1:9 wherein He obtained an eternal throne. The believers’ share in that joy must also be kept in view. After enduring (*hypemeinen*, the verb related to the noun *hypomonē* in 12:1; cf. vv. 3, 7) **the cross and scorning its shame**, Jesus assumed that triumphant position **at the right hand of the throne of God** (cf. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12) which presages His and the believers’ final victory (cf. 1:13-14). Nothing is more natural for a person than to overestimate the severity of his trials. The writer did not want his audience to do that.

12:3-4. If they would **consider the opposition from sinful men** which Jesus confronted and **endured** (*hypomenēkota*; cf. vv. 1-2, 7), they would be encouraged. After all, unlike Him, they had **not yet resisted... sin... to the point of bloodshed**. By “sin” the author probably primarily meant that of “sinful men” who opposed them, but doubtless also had their own sin in mind, which they had to resist in order to maintain a steadfast Christian profession.

12:5-8. The readers also seemed to **have forgotten the encouragement** found in Proverbs 3:11-12, which presents divine **discipline** as an evidence of divine love. Thus they should not **lose heart** (cf. Heb. 12:3) but should **endure hardship** (*hypomenete*, lit., “persevere”; cf. vv. 1-3) **as discipline** and regard it as an evidence of sonship, that is, that they are being trained for the glory of the many sons (cf. 2:10 and comments there). All God’s children are subject to His discipline, and in the phrase **everyone undergoes discipline** the writer for the last time used the Greek *metochoi* (“companions, sharers”), also used in 1:9; 3:1, 14; 6:4. (Lit., the Gr. reads, “. . . discipline, of which all have become sharers.”) In speaking of those who **are not disciplined and are thus illegitimate children**, he was probably thinking of Christians whose disloyalty to the faith resulted in their loss of inheritance (i.e., reward) which is acquired by the many sons and daughters. (In the Roman world, an “illegitimate child” had no inheritance rights.) What such Christians undergo, the author had shown, is severe judgment. On the other hand believers who undergo God’s “discipline” are being prepared by this educational process (*paideia*, “discipline,” lit., “child-training”; cf. Eph. 6:4) for millennial reward.

12:9-11. Drawing on the analogy of the discipline of earthly **fathers**, the author encouraged a submissive spirit to the discipline of **the Father of our spirits** which is life-preserving (**and live**) as well as productive of an experience of **His holiness**, which involves a rich **harvest of righteousness and peace**. But Christians must let this discipline have its full effect and be **trained by it**.

12:12-13. The author sensed the tendency to spiritual weakness in his readers, and in the light of the truths he had expounded he encouraged them to renew their strength. If they would do this and would pursue the **level paths** which real righteousness entails, the weakest among them (**the lame**) would not be further **disabled, but rather healed**. Their own strength would benefit weaker Christians.

12:14. **Peace with all men** as well as personal holiness must be vigorously sought since **without holiness** (*hagiasmos*) **no one will see the Lord**. Since no sin can stand in God's presence, Christians must—and will be—sinless when they see the Lord (cf. 1 John 3:2). That realization offers motivation for pursuing holiness here and now. But the author may also have had in mind the thought that one's perception of God even now is conditioned by his real measure of holiness (cf. Matt. 5:8).

12:15-17. As a grim reminder of what can happen among believers, the writer warned that **one** who **misses the grace of God** may become like a **bitter root** whose infidelity to God affects others. Here the author had in mind Deuteronomy 29:18 where an Old-Covenant apostate was called a "root. . . that produces such bitter poison." Such a person would be **godless** (*bebēlos*, "profane, unhallowed, desecrated") **like Esau**, Jacob's brother, whose loose and profane character led him to sell **his inheritance rights as the oldest son** for the temporary gratification of **a single meal**. He warned the readers not to yield to transitory pressures and forfeit their inheritances. If some did, they would ultimately regret the foolish step and might find their inheritance privileges irrevocably lost as were Esau's. This would of course be true of one who ended his Christian experience in a state of apostasy, which the writer had continually warned against.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Some stories we read, hear, or watch don't stick with us for long, even if they have great appeal at the time. Other stories, however, may cause us to ponder and deliberate over the course of months and years. Why the difference? What is it that sets enduring, classic stories apart from the many that are soon forgotten, even though the latter may feature many exciting elements of action and adventure? A story is classic to the degree it resonates with the moral order that God has established in creation and written on our hearts. The classic stories reflect in some way the broader human story of creation, fall, and redemption. And as they do, such stories lead us to deeper truths about ourselves and about life under God. The Chronicles of Narnia series is an example. The hero in classic stories is one who, by struggle and sacrifice, restores a right moral order for self and others. This is the direction taken in Hebrews 11, sometimes referred to as "Faith's Hall of Fame." There, faith as trust in the character and promises of God is illustrated in the lives of numerous named individuals of Israel's past. As the writer moves into what we designate as chapter 12, the heroic stories of the lives of patriarchal and other old-covenant believers are connected with ours.

Those who have virtuously endured severe suffering display a certain seriousness of character that sets them apart. Yet such suffering also enables them better to understand and relate to others. Foremost among such individuals is Jesus, of whom the writer to the Hebrews notes, "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8, lesson 7; compare 2:18; 4:15). The writer's point is not that Jesus moved from a state of disobedience to a state of obedience. Rather, he learned obedience in the sense of living out experientially the capacity for complete obedience that was at all times part of his character. When we think of the character of Jesus, we usually think first of his love, and we rightly want to be able to love others as he has loved us (1 John 4:11). Our ability to love is the outcome of our development in the basic virtues. If we want to love well, we seek the virtues of humility, integrity, wisdom, and holiness, because these virtues are grounded in who God is. They lead us to become like him and enable us to love more as he loves. We develop these virtues largely through pursuing them intentionally as we experience the adversities of life in a fallen world. As the discipline of physical exercise strengthens the body, so too the discipline of spiritual exercise strengthens the soul (sanctification). God's intent is that Christ be formed in us (Galatians 4:19). Discipline through suffering develops and refines our hearts as we mature in Christlike holiness. A goal of the writer of Hebrews is to encourage suffering Christians of Jewish background to persevere as followers of Jesus (see the Lesson Background of lesson 5). The pain of being ostracized seemed to be taking its toll. As tragic as that was, a return to a Judaism-without-Christ would be a case of "the cure is worse than the disease." The writer argues

against this course of action by establishing the superiority of Jesus over the old covenant and its priesthood. Although Israel's history had many heroes of faith, "none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:39, 40). With the opening therefore of today's lesson, the writer begins summarizing why all this is important to the reader.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

The Author's Example (Heb 12:1-4)

1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

4 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

Example that teaches laying aside the weight of sin (1)

Weight of riches (Luke 18:22-27)

22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." 23 When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. 24 Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! 25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" 27 Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

Weight of anxieties of life (Luke 21:34)

34 "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.

Weight of wicked deeds (Rom 13:12)

12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Weight of contamination of the body and spirit (2 Cor 7:1)

1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Weight of evil desires (Eph 4:22-24)

22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Weight of the sinful nature (Col 3:5-6)

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

Weight of loving the world (1 John 2:15-17)

15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Example that leads to faith in Jesus (2-3)

Faith in Jesus' intercession (Rom 8:31-35)

31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

Faith in Jesus' inward renewing (2 Cor 4:16-18)

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Faith in Jesus' faithfulness (Phil 1:6)

6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Faith in being hidden in Jesus (Col 3:1-4)

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Faith in Jesus' abilities (2 Tim 1:12)

12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

Faith in Jesus' priestly powers (Heb 4:14)

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Faith in Jesus and not ourselves (2 Cor 1:9)

9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

Faith in Jesus' indwelling (1 John 4:14-16)

15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

Example through bloodshed (4)

Willing to shed blood because of keeping the faith (2 Tim 4:6-7)

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Willing to shed blood because of the name of Jesus (Acts 21:13)

13 Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

Willing to shed blood because to die is gain in Jesus (Phil 1:21)

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Willing to shed blood because of the honor of finishing the task Jesus has assigned (Acts 20:24)

24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

The Author's Discipline (Heb 12:5-11)

5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Discipline that shows God's love (5-6)

Shows God's love because He only disciplines those He loves (Prov 3:12)

12 because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

Shows God's love because God doesn't spare the rod of discipline (Prov 13:24)

24 He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.

Shows God's love through His compassion and mercy (James 5:11)

11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Shows God's love because all things work for the good (Rom 8:28)

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Discipline that proves adoption into God's family (7-8)

Proves adoption because of being redeemed (Rom 8:22-23)

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Proves adoption because Jesus presents His children as blameless and pure (Phil 2:14-15)

14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe

Proves adoption because God brings His children to glory (Heb 2:10)

10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Proves adoption because only God's children can share in the sufferings of Jesus (1 Peter 4:12-14)

12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

Discipline because God knows what's best for us (9-10)

God knows what's best because He never withholds good things from those who endure (Ps 84:11)

11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly.

God knows what's best because only God can meet all needs (Phil 4:19)

19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

God knows what's best because God's grace is all sufficient (2 Cor 12:9)

9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

God knows what's best because He knows how to give good gifts (Luke 11:11-13)

11 If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

God knows what's best because His gifts are eternal (John 4:10)

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

God knows what's best because every good and perfect gift is from God (James 1:17)

17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Because discipline trains in righteousness (vs 11)

Trains in righteousness because that's what the kingdom of God is all about (Rom 14:17)

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

Trains in righteousness because God's discipline opens the gates to righteousness (Ps 118:18-19)

18 The LORD has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death. 19 Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.

Trains in righteousness because it exercises godliness (1 Tim 4:8)

8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

Trains in righteousness because righteousness leads to holiness (Rom 6:19)

19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.

The Author's Expectations (Heb 12:12-13)

12 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,
13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

Expectation of endurance (12)

Enduring by standing firm (Matt 24:13)

13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Enduring by persistence in doing good (Rom 2:7)

7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

Enduring in doing the will of God (Heb 10:36)

36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Enduring by persevering in the testing of our faith (James 1:2-4)

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Enduring by patiently waiting on God (James 5:8)

8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

Enduring by overcoming the world (Rev 3:10-13)

10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. 11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.

Expectation of godly change (13)

Expectation of godliness because of the new self is created to be like God (Eph 4:21-24)

22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Expectation of godliness because Jesus reconciled us (Col 1:21-22)

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-

Expectation of godliness because God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16)

15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Expectation of godliness because it achieves eternal glory (2 Cor 4:17)

17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Let me begin by summarizing our text. As we conclude this lesson, let me summarize the chapter by focusing your attention on the matter of discipline.

1. Self-discipline is necessary to finish the race (Hebrews 12:1-3).
2. Adversity in the life of the Christian is really divine discipline, and such discipline is proof of our sonship, and of God's love and care for us (Hebrews 12:4-11).
3. Discipline is the ongoing work of the church (Hebrews 12:12-17; cf. also 1 Thessalonians 5:14).

We need to see suffering for what it really is, and what it is not. The first generation of Israelites to leave Egypt interpreted their difficulties as God's apathy, His inability to help, or His sinister desire to kill them in the wilderness. This is why they rebelled against God and failed to enter into the rest He had promised. God did bring adversity into the lives of the Israelites, but it was not to destroy them; rather it was to reveal their need for faith. The problem of pain was one that Asaph had to grapple with in Psalm 73, and he came to see that his affliction was really a gift from God, one that caused him to draw near to Him, which is the ultimate good. Likewise, God brought adversity into Job's life, and this eventually resulted in his spiritual growth.

Suffering, for the Christian, is not to be viewed as some kind of accident, or as an oversight on God's part. Suffering is God's "school of discipline" by which He enhances our faith and draws us nearer to Him. Rather than causing us to question God's existence, or His goodness, it assures us that He is our Father, and we are His sons and daughters.

Our text exposes the error commonly taught by the "health and wealth prosperity preachers." They would have us think that God is waiting in heaven to shower us with earthly blessings: popularity, prosperity, physical health and so much more – if we only have sufficient faith (which we demonstrate by sending what we now have to them). I have yet to hear a prosperity preacher teach this passage in Hebrews, because they don't want to tell folks that difficult times are here and that harder times are coming. People don't pay to listen to preachers who tell us to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and to follow Jesus. If we are truly people of faith, then we will be like the Old Testament saints. We will endure present adversity with patience, certain that God's blessings will come to us (most likely) after we die.

Strange as it may seem, I believe that our text has much to teach us about parenting and child training. Our author, much like we find in the Book of Proverbs, links earthly parenting with God's parenting His children as their heavenly Father. In our text, he compares earthly fathers to God, who deals with us as our Father. Earthly fathers "discipline" their sons. It is often painful, but in the end, it points their children toward God, and in the direction of godly character. Like earthly fathers, God deals with us as our Father. This, too, is painful, but it produces the fruit of righteousness. While earthly fathers are human and their discipline is flawed, it still produces good things in the life of the child. God's discipline is perfect.

So, if God's discipline can be compared to the discipline of our earthly fathers, then shouldn't Christian fathers pattern their child training after God's discipline? If God's discipline is sometimes painful (the woodshed we talked about at the beginning of this message), then shouldn't our discipline sometimes be painful as well? If God's discipline is sometimes like a spanking, shouldn't some of our discipline actually be a spanking? This is not something new and novel; it is what we are clearly taught in the Book of Proverbs. If God withholds certain things from His children for their good, then how is it that many Christian parents refuse to withhold anything from their children? Why do we "indulge" our children when God does not "indulge" us in the same way?

It seems to me that the ultimate act of discipline these days is the "time out." We put a child in a chair and make them stay there for a period of time, as though that will teach them important life lessons. As some of my fellow-believers pointed out to me after I preached this message, God did have His own kind of "time out." Jonah had his three-day "time out" in the belly of the great fish (and, incidentally, it didn't really change

Jonah's heart, as we find in the Book of Jonah, chapter 4). The first generation of Israelites had a forty-year time out, but this did not really change them either. The Jews had a big "time out" in Babylon, and thanks to God, it did bear some fruit. Church discipline is a kind of "time-out," but recognize that this kind of "time out" involved turning one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit might come to repentance.⁹ One might even view hell as a kind of eternal "time out."

My point is not to send you home to immediately paddle your children. My point is that our discipline is patterned more after our culture than after our heavenly Father. Our text should not only change the way we think about our sufferings; it should also change the way we think about our parenting. Our parenting should seek to expose our children's misbehavior as sin, and we should in our discipline reflect how seriously God takes sin. Divine discipline is much more than some kind of heavenly paddle, but it is often painful, prompting us to pay closer attention to what God has said in His Word.

So I leave you with these questions:

1. Does our discipline take sin as seriously as God does?
2. Does our earthly discipline seek to expose sin and then to seek God's solution for sin in Jesus?
3. Do we take our responsibility seriously so far as it concerns discipline in the church? Are we seeking to identify and evangelize the lost who are among us? Do we actively seek to know one another well enough to recognize weaknesses and then seek to encourage faith and perseverance?

Last of all, a word on the resurrection (since this message happens to fall on Resurrection Sunday). This message may not sound much like an Easter message, but the subject of the resurrection is very important in the Book of Hebrews. For example, the resurrection is central to the faith of the Old Testament saints:

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. He had received the promises, yet he was ready to offer up his only son. 18 God had told him, "***Through Isaac descendants will carry on your name,***" 19 and he reasoned that God could even raise him from the dead, and in a sense he received him back from there (Hebrews 11:17-19; see also 6:1-2; 11:35).

The hope of every Old Testament saint rested on the resurrection of Jesus, and thus the resurrection of every believer to their promised inheritance.

The resurrection is not the central thrust of our text, or even of chapter 12, though it was central to chapter 11. The cross of Calvary is the measure of God's hatred of sin and of its penalty. The suffering that Jesus endured on the cross of Calvary is the measure of our sins. The resurrection is the measure of God's acceptance of the sacrifice Jesus made on behalf of sinners. The resurrection proves that God was satisfied with the High Priestly sacrifice of Jesus. And finally, the resurrection is the validation of all of the claims of our Lord Jesus. Jesus staked His teaching and earthly ministry on the fact that He would rise from the dead:

38 Then some of the experts in the law along with some Pharisees answered him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." 39 But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For just as Jonah was ***in the belly of the huge fish for three days and three nights,*** so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:38-40).

I fear that for some (especially unbelievers) the resurrection (Easter) is the opportunity to focus on something other than our Lord's infinite suffering at Calvary. Easter does not in any way diminish the magnitude of Christ's work on the cross. The resurrection is God's exclamation point on Christ's atoning, sacrificial death! Have you acknowledged the magnitude of your sins, and that hell is the punishment God has determined as appropriate? Have you trusted in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus in your place, so that you may be delivered from divine judgment, and have eternal life? That is what the Book of Hebrews is all about.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/28-problem-pain-hebrews-124-17>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

We live in a fallen world, and we ourselves are not without sin. The hardships and sufferings of life can bring intense discouragement, even times of despair. But there is a truth that can lift us above discouragement and draw us ever closer to Jesus. That truth is that God can and does work through the hardships of life in a fallen world. He also works directly in his ministry of discipline to lead us to maturity. That maturity, which is Christlike holiness, is for our highest good and for his greatest glory. Seek it!

Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Every believer has a battle against sin. But rarely do we as American Christians have to give our lives to maintain our faith in Christ. Western Christianity, in fact, has generally had it easy for a long time. The first-century Christians who first read this letter, however, were experiencing some serious suffering. They had been insulted, persecuted, and thrown in jail and had their property confiscated (10:32-34). Yet the writer of Hebrews encouraged them to think of all this simply as discipline from God, their Father. In reality, the persecution they were going through was reason to rejoice. Such fatherly "discipline" showed that they had been accepted as true children of God. The apostles also rejoiced that they had been counted worthy to suffer for Christ (Acts 5:41). Paul felt a mystical bond with Christ as he suffered; he viewed it as carrying on the suffering that Christ had begun (Col. 1:24). Not all those who seem to be God's children truly are His children, and enduring hardship/discipline is one decisive factor in revealing the reality of one's faith. Jesus' parable about the four soils (Matt. 13) and others remind us that not all who have a belief in Christ persevere in it. The reality thus becomes clear: those who quit are lost. Those who persevere, however, prove their faith, and the Father's discipline provides the opportunity. Remaining loyal despite hardship and discipline produces a fruitful crop of righteousness and peace. The outcome makes all the toil worthwhile. Since all this is true, it makes sense to cheer up no matter how painful the affliction. The reality is that the trouble believers experience lasts only a little while, but the marvelous joy and glory that will result from enduring it is eternal (2 Cor. 4:17). What more reason do we need to strengthen ourselves in the Lord and revitalize our efforts to carry out the will of God? God wants us to finish our race well; therefore, He chastens us. This chastening is a blend of discipline and nurture. When we experience it, we should not despise it or ignore it. Rather, we should embrace it because it is a sign that God loves us. He is treating us as His children. Only the most callous, dysfunctional father would ignore teaching and correcting his child. Earthly fathers have just a few years to teach and discipline their children before they reach maturity. They do the best they can with what they know. God, on the other hand, has perfect wisdom and knows what is best for us. His discipline is always for our benefit, to make us holy. Discipline is like pruning. When a plant is pruned, it produces more fruit. The pruning of discipline in our lives will reap a harvest of peace and righteousness. As we run our race, we need to be strong in our faith so that we can help weak ones—who are following behind us—avoid stumbling.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. Fighting sin in our lives helps us follow Jesus (Heb. 12:1)
2. To follow Jesus, you need to focus on Him and what He has accomplished (vs. 2)
3. Jesus is our example of how to endure hardships (vss. 3-4)
4. God disciplines those He loves to make them more like Him (vss. 5-8)
5. If we respect our earthly fathers who do not have all knowledge, we should respect our Heavenly Father even more (vss. 9-10)
6. Hardships produce fruit in our lives and make us stronger (vss. 11-13)