

# Hebrews 12:3-17 // The Lord Disciplines The One He Loves

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Preacher: Martin Ayers

[ 0 : 00 ] So that's Isaiah chapter 35, beginning at verse 1. Strengthen the feeble hands.

Steady the knees that give way. Say to those with fearful hearts, Be strong. Do not fear. Your God will come. He will come with vengeance, with divine retribution.

He will come to save you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs.

In the haunt where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. And a highway will be there. It will be called the way of holiness.

[ 1 : 30 ] It will be for those who walk on that way. The unclean will not journey on it. Wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast.

They will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there. And those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing.

Everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them. And sorrow and sighing will flee away. The letter to the Hebrews, chapter 12, starting at verse 3.

Which is on page 1210 of the church Bibles.

Page 1210, Hebrews, chapter 12, beginning at verse 3. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

[ 2 : 51 ] In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son.

It says, My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline. And do not lose heart when he rebukes you. Because the Lord disciplines the one he loves.

And he chastens everyone he accepts as his son. Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as his children.

For what children are not disciplined by their father. If you are not disciplined, and everyone undergoes discipline, then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.

Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the father of spirits and live?

[ 3 : 58 ] They disciplined us for a little while, as they thought best. But God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone, and to be holy. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God, and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterwards, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected.

[ 5 : 17 ] Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done. Thanks be to God. Thanks, Innes. Please do keep the Bibles open.

It's page 1210. There's an outline on the notice sheet, and let's pray. Let's ask for God's help. So Holy Spirit, on this day of Pentecost, we thank you that you are here with us, that you've made your home in every believer, and we ask that you will be our teacher, that your word of truth will be our guide, and the glory of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will be our chief concern, for we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, there's a kind of Christian story, a story of how someone has become a Christian and gone on as a Christian, that we often hear today, that goes something like, well, I've hit rock bottom in my life, and then I put my trust in Jesus, and now life is amazing.

You know, I was a footballer, I was out of form, I was injured, I was depressed, I couldn't go on, and then I found Jesus, and it's turned my life around, and I've won trophies. And if that's your story with Jesus, praise God.

That's a great story, isn't it? Because Jesus does turn people's lives around. He rescues us from the power of sin, people find freedom, people find freedom from addictions, they find that building your life on the offer of full and free forgiveness gives you renewed security and joy, knowing that God the Father has adopted you, and God the Father is generous, he blesses his people abundantly.

[ 6 : 55 ] So when we hear stories like that, we thank God. At the same time, passages like this one, Hebrews 12, prepare us for knowing that it may be that things are very tough for you as a Christian, or that they get very tough.

And it reminds me of Rosaria Butterfield, who's written this book, *Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*. She was a feminist academic, and she became a Christian. And I heard her speaking about how she became a Christian, and she just got to the point where she decided to become a Christian.

Then she said, and that's when my life fell apart. Which isn't what we would expect someone to say in the Western world. It was when she became a Christian that everything fell apart.

It was the great cost to her. And the Christian life can involve great pain and great cost. Pain because we live in a broken world with broken bodies. And if you're a Christian, anything that could happen to anyone in the world could happen to you.

And cost, because some things can happen to you because you're a Christian, as you face hostility. Or just the cost of being a disciple every day, choosing to live to please God, instead of to please yourself.

[ 8 : 08 ] Now the writer to the Hebrews says at the end of his letter that it's a word of exhortation. So he's writing truth that he wants to change us with. He wants to spur us on with what he's telling us.

And it was an urgent book, an urgent charge, to its first hearers because they were in danger of drifting away from trusting Jesus. And he urges us to persevere.

And Hebrews chapter 12 here gives you new lenses through which you can view suffering in your life differently. I know they might be difficult verses to handle if you're really in the valley at the moment.

I appreciate that. But they're really good verses for us. And it's great to impress them on our hearts so that we're forearmed for future difficulty.

We started chapter 12 last week and saw that in this chapter, the writer's picture for the Christian life is that it is an agonizing race. So you see that in verse 1 of chapter 12, run with perseverance, the race marked out for us.

[ 9 : 15 ] And then, in the section we're in tonight, look down at verse 12. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet so that the lame may not be disabled but rather healed.

Possibly, that end of verse 13 is not so much lame people but lame limbs kind of recovering your strength in your body for this agonizing race.

So we don't want to drop out of the agonizing race that is the Christian life and we don't want to fall short. So the writer gives us three steps that will help us keep running to the end. And our first one is, keep trusting your good father.

So look again at verse 4 where he acknowledges again that the Christian life may well be very difficult. He says, in your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Not yet resisted. Now what's he talking about here? He could be talking about our internal struggle against sinful desires that wage war against us. But what he's just talked about in verse 3 is Jesus' struggle against sin and particularly against external sin.

[10:27] The hostility of neighbors who hated him and for us, the hostility of neighbors who, because they hated him, hate that we follow him.

That's a struggle against sin in our world. God is not responsible for the wrongs that other people do. God is good and he's never morally responsible for other people's evil intention.

But what we're seeing in this chapter is that he is also a big God, a sovereign God, able to be in full control of whatever comes into our lives. So the writer gently corrects his discouraged heroes in verse 5.

If you just look there, see that gentle correction? And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? And he points them back to Proverbs chapter 3 which is this great chapter about trusting the Lord.

And he quotes from it here in verses 5 and 6. The big idea though comes in verse 7 if you just have a look there. He says, End you a hardship as discipline. God is treating you as his children.

[11:42] And when he uses the word discipline there, he doesn't use the word for athletic discipline which you might expect in this chapter because he said it's about running a race. Okay, so we might think he'd use the word gymnasium of discipline like a fitness coach and going to the gym.

But he uses a different word. He uses the word for parental discipline, fatherly discipline. So I've done spinning classes where you have like a spinning instructor at the front and you have to put like a heart rate monitor on and on the wall there's all these discs and they show everyone's heart rates and they've got like different zones green, blue, yellow, red.

And I've had this experience of like when you get to the climax of your spinning class and the instructors going who's not in the red zone? Who's not? Get in the red zone!

I want you all in the red zone! Okay, that's not the picture in Hebrews 12. You see, that's the thing. It's not the fitness coach shouting in difficulty no pain, no gain, just give me more.

No, we're to think of a loving father and we're to think of the way that a good parent trains and corrects and guides their child and sets boundaries for them for their good.

[13:00] He assumes that we've had some kind of experience of a father doing their best in verse 10 but even though they would have been imperfect at that, even if they were good at it, they wouldn't have been perfect but he's saying how much more can we trust our good father?

So, if we view hardship through that lens, we're going to think about our lives very differently, aren't we? If you just think, in what circumstances do we usually acknowledge that God has been at work in our lives?

Isn't it the good stuff? You know, we get a job that we applied for, it was the Lord, the Lord is good or, you know, you're praying for a parking space, you're driving around looking for one, you find one, it was the Lord, the Lord is good, God at work but what about when there isn't a parking space or what about when there's no job?

What about when there's no apparent yes in answer to our prayers to God? Well, God is at work but if we're being disciplined, does that mean we've done something wrong?

Is it that kind of discipline? Well, I think from my reading of the Bible almost always no. That would almost never be the case that the hardship you're going through is God's discipline in a way that is trying to root out something that you've done wrong in your life and bring you to repentance.

[14:37] That's, the way we think about the word discipline with parents in today's world is often that narrow understanding of what discipline is. But discipline is a much broader category and here in Hebrews 12 it's clearly much broader.

It's about being trained through challenges rather than about being punished for doing something wrong. So, it's not like the equivalent in the spiritual life of like being grounded or something. It's this much broader work of a parent exposing their child in love to the challenges of life in the real world to help them grow in character.

So, if you're a Christian and you're experiencing hardship I think it is appropriate to ask yourself is there something in my life that God is seeking to bring into the light?

Is there an area of unrepentant sin that I've, something I've been clinging on to and God is bringing me into difficulty to expose that? And it's appropriate to ask that question of yourself but that would

be an exceptional thing.

[15:44] That would be unusual. Normally the answer will be no. I'm not being, it's not to do with my behaviour this and we really want to make sure that we don't end up in some kind of false guilt when things are going wrong in our lives.

In verse 5 the writer picks up, let's go back to there, he quotes from Proverbs 3 and he quotes us two different ways that we might react wrongly to hardship in our lives as the kind of, the training type discipline of a good father.

He says in verse 5, my son do not make light of the Lord's discipline and do not lose heart when he rebukes you because the Lord disciplines the one he loves.

So when you're suffering in life don't make light of it, turn to God in it, pray, ask God to take it away by all means, plead with him but also as you're enduring it ask him to give you the strength to endure and ask him to teach you through it.

Look for what is God teaching me through this, don't make light of it. At the same time, don't lose heart in it. How does viewing hardship in our lives as the discipline of a loving father empower us and enable us not to lose heart when life is difficult?

[17:08] Well, what destabilizes us when we're suffering is that deep sense that we're not in control. Things are happening in our lives that we wish weren't happening and we are profoundly not in control of them, to put them right.

We can lose heart for that. Well, what a difference it makes in those situations to remember this is all in the hands of my heavenly father who is so constant and so faithful and so wise and so good and he is so for me he would never allow hardship in my life that would be more than I can bear and would not be for my good.

He earned the right to be trusted like that at the cross when he sent Jesus to die for us. And we might think that hardship is a sign that well maybe I'm not a child of God but look at verse 8 because he says the opposite.

He says if you're not disciplined and everyone undergoes discipline then you're not legitimate not true sons and daughters at all. In other words if you are a Christian hardship is a sign that you are a true child of God and he is a good father is training you.

He is at work alongside you helping you through it so that you grow in character. So what is the good that God is going for when we endure hardship? Well it's in verse 10 he says about the earthly fathers he said they disciplined us for a little while as they thought best then he tells us why God disciplines us for our good in order that we may share in his holiness then in verse 11 it's the same idea through the pain trust what it will produce look for what it will produce a harvest of righteousness and peace so God cares more about our holiness than our happiness holiness is the bible's word for being devoted to God every Christian has been made holy by God he looks on us as holy as devoted to him consecrated for him set apart from other things to belong to him and because he wants to see that holiness grow in us so that more and more we'll have the character of Christ we'll be more like

[19:21] Jesus he brings hardship into our lives how does that work well when I think about my journey in holiness although I need to trust God's promise that he looks on me now as holy he counts me as holy there is a long way to go for me and presumably for you as well in being holy so how does this work well there's internal brokenness in me there's foolishness there's pride there's greed there's lust there's idolatry and God brings external brokenness into my life to root out the brokenness inside that through difficulty and responding with his spirit's help faithfully to difficulty he will turn pride into humility and greed into generosity and lust into purity and self pity into joy at the successes of others and self worship into adoration of God and worship of God's good gifts into worship of the giver himself so in the agonizing race of the

Christian life keep trusting your good father so that you don't lose heart you don't give up you grow in holiness secondly the writer says keep on the right track so he writes to Christians who are feeling weary in verse 12 and he says because you can trust your father strengthen yourselves in verse 12 strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees then verse 11 sorry verse 13 make level paths for your feet now the staff team when we looked at this as a staff team this week helped me with this when we're looking at this passage together that the writer here he's quoted Proverbs 3 up in verses 5 and 6 we can see that but he's actually quoting Proverbs 4 in verse 13 so he's obviously got that section of Proverbs in mind and he wants the hearers to have it in mind and in Proverbs chapter 4 where it says make level paths for your feet it's again all about this idea of keeping going

on the way that God has marked out for you so let me just read

Proverbs chapter 4 verse 25 he says let your eyes look straight ahead fix your gaze directly before you give to the paths for your feet be steadfast in all your ways do not turn to the right or the left keep your foot from evil so make every effort you can to verse 1 keep running the race God has marked out for you in verse 14 he tells us how we'll run that race he says make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy without holiness no one will see the Lord so the priority is holiness we had our first reading Isaiah 35 where it talks about the way we'll go on to glory is called the way of holiness and again that idea that holiness is about being devoted to God it's only those who are devoted to God who will see the Lord in the end and so God has put us on this path when we put our trust in Jesus that he counts us as holy and then there's this race marked out for us of living obedient lives that mean that we will keep growing in being devoted to God a few of us at St Silas run park run in different places and I was talking to someone from our church who's here tonight but I won't say who it is because

I haven't asked their permission who told me that they are one off running a full alphabet of park runs so they've gone round and they've run there's one letter missing for them but they've run 25 of the letter of the alphabet but when you're running a park run that you don't normally run you obviously you don't know the route and what you rely on is that there are marshals everywhere wherever there's a turning in their jackets to guide you which way to turn well for us as we're running the race God has marked out for us the race markings are the commands of the word of God because the race is the holy race we're to pursue holiness not to divert to the left or to the right that's the goal and it's great to be looking at this isn't it when last Sunday we thought about the race it's remarkable in this section of Hebrews how many of our church family are into running that's what's emerged and some of you hate running and so it's especially good for you because you get that it's an agonizing race because every race is agonizing for you but some of you love running and this morning who was so

I've had an update Michael Tomacek finished the Edinburgh Marathon which is great because he last week looked very injured and he told me he's finished it and he who else were Ella and Jack Baird and Rachel Hope and Amy from our church all ran the half marathon in Edinburgh so here you are everyone's talking about running and we can think about it with Hebrews 12 and in Hebrews 12 the idea the picture is to keep your eyes fixed on the goal in verse 14 of seeing the Lord you see that there that's the prize that's the blessing that our hearts will burst with joy on the day of Christ when we finally behold what he made us for the transcendent majesty and beauty of the glory of God in Jesus face that's the finish line and so we're to keep going stretching ourselves to be holy because we want to see him and then he warns us to watch out for things that could divert us off track so in verse 15 he says it's language from the

[ 25 : 06 ] Old Testament from Deuteronomy see to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many so he's saying don't turn away in bitterness and this is really striking language because what's doing the rounds among some in our church at the moment is this there was a podcast recently by a minister who was here last October Rico Tice and he's written a book called Faithful Leaders and he was talking in this podcast about about it how do you keep going in the Christian life and he talked about how for him every day he faces a battle every morning to get off the road of bitterness the road of resentment and get on the road of thankfulness and so every morning he's got a set of questions he asks himself with answers from the bible but his goal that drives him is he says naturally I'm on a train of resentment and I've got to get off that train and I've got to get on a train of thankfulness to keep going and what he's saying is that

Christians he knows who've fallen by the wayside if you haven't finished the race it's often because they haven't done that work and bitterness has grown up in their lives so we need to work at growing in thankfulness to God through keeping ourselves in speaking the truth from the scriptures about how wonderful God has been to us the other related danger is in verse 16 it's that we're lured away by something that we see that encourages us to divert from the tracks so verse 16 see to it that no one is sexually immoral or is godless like Esau who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son so Esau was the oldest son of Isaac who'd been given Isaac his father Abraham being given the promises of God Esau's the oldest son so by kind of birth rights he should inherit the promises he's out hunting one day he gets home he's utterly famished his brother Jacob has made some red stew and almost inexplicably

Esau's kind of give me some of that stew and Jacob says not until you give me your birth right and he gives it away for some stew extraordinary but basically he allows his desire for immediate satisfaction of an appetite to mean more to him than his inheritance from God and it sounds inexplicable and like madness but effectively that's what any of us do when we decide that satisfying an appetite that we have in the present is more important to us than keeping going on the road of holiness to see God in the future all around us the world packages up sin in very attractive ways we see sin packaged up in ways that are very appealing they promise to satisfy our appetites if only we'll just come off the path of godly obedience so it's worth asking yourself what would most tempt me to walk off the track and leave the race that God has marked out for me and let's notice as well that language in verse 15 of looking out for others so in verse 15 he says see to it that no one falls short of the grace and then verse 16 see that no one is sexually immoral so a bit like I'm talking about the Edinburgh marathon or half marathon today those are like community races aren't they for most of us

I mean some of you might be here who try and win a race like that but for the tens of thousands of the rest of us you're just trying to finish and so if you see somebody struggling you spur them on with some encouragement to keep going and it's that kind of idea in the Christian life of looking over our shoulders in church life at the people around us and noticing who's not here who might be drifting who do I need to drop a line to who do I need to meet up with to say what's going on are you are you drifting are you okay is everything all right I'm worried about you because we're trying to keep going and see to it that no one fails to finish the race this was a moment on the picture there in the world triathlon series in Mexico when Johnny Brownlee was actually winning the race and he was so exhausted he got ill and right near the end he started wobbling and his brother caught him up when he was near collapse and Alistair Brownlee rather than just overtake him put his arm around his shoulders and he helped him over the line

Alistair helping his brother Johnny to finish the race half carried him over it was an act of fierce sacrificial determined brotherly love such is our attitude to be with those around us so I remember after I'd just been a Christian in a church a couple of years a friend had been a Christian longer than me visiting my church and he really helpfully said to me who here are your really good friends who are your friends and I realised at the time I hadn't really made good friends in the church I knew everybody and I enjoyed the kind of the chat but there was this he was saying there needs to be two or three people that you're trying to be a good friend for and as you try and be a good friend for them they'll be a good friend for you and you can do this kind of one anothering see to it that no one falls short of the grace of God how are we going to do that for ourselves and keep going and help others do that well that's our third point keep looking to Jesus so we're just going to finish by looking back at verse 2b again because it's so vital to the chapter if you just look there again verse 2 fixing our eyes on

[ 30 : 59 ] Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of faith for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross scorning at shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God how did Jesus endure the trials he did it for the joy set before him what was that joy for a man who already had enough holiness to see the Lord who had already enjoyed the perfection of heaven well why did Jesus even get into the race why did he start the race why did he leave heaven to do that why in the servant songs in Isaiah predicting the Messiah coming does it say he will look on the results of his suffering and be satisfied what was he seeking to achieve the only thing he didn't have was us in Jesus suffering he was seeking us and now he says in your suffering seek me depend on me look to me seek to be like me look at his suffering so that you can be absolutely sure that you can submit yourself to his father's discipline and live he lost

God in his suffering so that in our suffering we can have God with us right by our side so let's pray together heavenly father we thank you for this word of exhortation and we ask that you will write it on our hearts so that in the midst of our suffering in the midst of pain in life and the costs of following Jesus we will know deeply that we are loved by you and that you can work even in the most difficult times we experience for our good keeping us running the race producing in us the holy character you intend and may you finish that work for our good and for your glory amen what