

DAY 7: THE VALUE OF HARDSHIP

Hebrews 12:1-11

RUNNING THE RACE “*Therefore*” points us back to the heroes of faith in chapter 11, whom the author describes as “*so great a cloud of witnesses.*” Some see the witnesses as spectators who look down from heaven like an audience in an amphitheater looks down on participants in an arena. Another view is that, by their steadfastness, these believers have borne witness to the faithfulness of God. Their example inspires perseverance through trials.

“*Let us also lay aside every weight*” refers to anything that weighs down a runner in a race. Not all that hinders a Christian is sin, but anything that impedes progress should be discarded. What hinders one believer may not affect another. Under the Holy Spirit’s guidance, each Christian must decide what to put aside. We must also get rid of “*sin which clings so closely.*” Sin is a snare; it can ruin a race.

Finally, the race must be “*run with endurance.*” Christians must possess endurance—the determination to keep going even when you want to give up. The word translated “*race*” means *a hard and earnest struggle*. The Christian race is not a sprint; it’s a marathon that requires controlled, sustained power that pushes toward its goal.

THINK ABOUT how good things could be an obstacle to our spiritual development. The problem is not with the things themselves, but with our attraction to them and the priority we give them. The apostle Paul said, “*I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*” (Philippians 4:12-13). Nothing hindered Paul. He was intent on running the race. If the Holy Spirit pinpoints something as a snare in your life, what will you do?

Jesus Christ is the Creator of the course of our race. We look to Jesus because He is not only the Author (originator) of the life of faith, but also the perfect model of that life. He fulfilled the will of God and finished His course of faith without failure. The phrase “*our faith*” implies that Jesus has begun a work of faith in us that He will see through to completion.

This is the only place in the book of Hebrews where the author speaks of the Cross, recognizing the solitary ordeal Jesus faced. One aspect of “*the joy*” Jesus anticipated was the restoration of the glory He had before the Incarnation. “*Endured the cross, despising the shame*” speaks of the physical and emotional pain that came from a disgraceful method of death. But Jesus disregarded the pain and disgrace; they were not worthy of consideration when compared to the joy of doing His Father’s will.

The reward for the Son’s obedience is now powerfully stated: He “*is seated.*” The Resurrection, the Ascension, and the resumption of eternal authority and glory are all captured in this phrase. The author is confident in the finished work of Jesus Christ. As Jesus suffered the misunderstanding and hostility of sinful men, so readers of this epistle may compare their own lives to Him and “*not grow weary or fainthearted*” (12:3).

ENDURING DISCIPLINE “*In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood*” (Hebrews 12:4). Those to whom this epistle was originally written had suffered severe persecution, but they had not yet been called on to die for their faith. Martyrdom is the fate of only a few, but all God’s people experience discipline.

“*My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord*” (12:5) addresses Christians who have difficulty seeing that God’s sovereign grace works through life’s trials as well as its joys. To avoid God’s training is to avoid maturity. Some believers are overwhelmed by the Lord’s discipline. They lose courage under the weight of their troubles. They forget that the God who tests is also the God who loves and helps. He promises that He will not test us beyond what we are able to bear.



“*The Lord disciplines the one He loves*” (Hebrews 12:6). Instead of being driven to

despair by adversity, Christians ought to realize that they are of such value to God that He will do all that is necessary to bring them to maturity. Only an unloved child is free of a disciplining hand.

In 12:6, the word “*chastises*” refers to *correction*. Whether by example, correction, or punishment, the Father works to develop heirs fit for His kingdom. Discipline is evidence of belonging to a family in which all the children have a share. In the ancient world, fathers did not give illegitimate children the same discipline they gave legitimate children. Furthermore, illegitimate children had no claim to inheritance. But the Hebrew readers are legitimate children and need to be thankful for a caring Father’s demands and restrictions. Even Christ “*learned obedience through what He suffered.*”

Discipline is demanding and sometimes painful. It can be compared to the work of a physician or surgeon. Medical treatments are often painful, but their purpose of achieving better health is unquestionably good. In a much greater way, the Lord’s treatment is designed for the good of those He loves, for in the end “*it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness*” (12:11). Limited human perspective may make it difficult to perceive the necessity for discipline, but faith sees it as one of God’s richest gifts of grace.

While the ultimate purpose of God’s discipline is to produce His character in His children, other benefits result as well. First, discipline prevents sin. What seems to be inconvenience or hardship may be God’s loving protection. God cares about making us spiritually mature. When a person has been tried and tested, has endured, and has remained true to God, that individual will reap a harvest of righteousness and peace.

PERSONALIZE this lesson. While God uses hardship to train us, we must be careful not to see all suffering as punishment; it is often simply a result of living in an imperfect world. We don’t need to add guilt to our own or someone else’s pain.

When trials come, we may ask God if He has a lesson for us to learn, but sometimes He doesn’t make the reason for our pain clear. In times like that a good question to ask God might be, “How do you want me to respond in this hardship?” God can transform us through situations that are overwhelming or relentless. By God’s grace and our perseverance, trials can build us up. Therefore we can say: “*We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28).

REVIEW: THE VALUE OF HARDSHIP

13. In one or two sentences describe the method and purpose of God’s discipline.