

**HEBREWS 42
(Hebrews 12:3-12)**

**DISCIPLINE FOR THE COURSE
By Ron Harvey
(June 13, 2012)**

INTRODUCTION

This passage of Scripture that we are in (Hebrews 12) is to a large degree about suffering. And sooner or later it will apply in particular to each of us. Many of us in our church family are getting up in years and it is likely that sickness and physical suffering will increase.

And in the end, much will depend on how we endure suffering. Much will hinge on how we receive suffering and whether or not we show the grace of God in our life in the midst of it.

A great story will be told when suffering comes our way. And our faith or our lack of faith will be set on display. The world will either marvel at our faith or it will say, "See, he doesn't believe in God after all."

We will either be improved by our suffering or we will be made worse according to the nature of our faith.

We will either remain in the race or we will get out of the race?

We saw last time that living the Christian life is like running a race.

Let us run with patience the race that is set before us. (v.1)

This is a race that is not a short race. It is not a sprint. It is a long marathon. That is why our text says, "Run with patience the race that is set before us." The word patience is hupomone in the Greek. This is a combination of two words – hypo meaning under and mone meaning to remain. And so it means to remain under. It means that when pressure is applied, to remain under. When you have run half of the race and you are starting to feel the pain and the discomfort, don't veer off the track, but rather, remain under. Run with endurance.

In other words, this is a race where the victory goes not so much to the swift as to the one who steadily goes forward every day and who stays the course and doesn't quit.

Let us *run with patience* (endurance) *the race that is set before us.*

Many people start out this race with a lot of enthusiasm. And they run, as it were, in a hard sprint for about 10 or 15 seconds. And if the race were a sprint they would be the star runner. But the race is not a sprint. And after a short burst of speed out of the starting blocks, they die out quickly and they veer off the course and the other runners pass them by.

You see, the race that is set before us is a very long race. And he that is to run this race well must do it with patience and endurance.

In the Christian life, it is he that endures to the end that wins the prize. And the great prize to be won is salvation itself.

But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.
Mt. 24:13

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Rev.2:10

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

James 2:12

Now you might say, "I thought salvation was something that God gives me; that salvation is by grace through faith; that it is not by works lest any man should boast."

And right you are. It is an absolute gift of God. It is something that you cannot possibly earn and He must give it. But once he gives it by his sheer grace and goodness, then he must bring that salvation to pass in

your life. We are his workmanship and he must mold us like a lump of clay into a vessel fit for honor.

Whereas we were unholy, God will make us holy. Whereas we were self righteous, God will make us humble. Whereas we once served ourselves, God will make us to serve others.

And according to our text, God does this by laying out a course for us to run.

Example: When the army gets in new recruits, the drill sergeant has the task of converting lazy, self absorbed young teenagers into fighting men. And he does it by severe discipline and hard training. He develops a course for them to run every day. And he turns these little boys into grown men.

And God has set a course before us. And he will shape us up and make us fit for his kingdom. By this course he will bring us to a higher plane of holiness.

And after all, this is God's highest end for us. God has saved us, not first and foremost for our happiness, but for our holiness. Now if God makes us happy in this life, then we might not be holy. But If God makes us holy, then we shall ultimately be happy.

God's aim for us is that we should be holy, not only in our position before Him, but in our very nature and in our practice.

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him . . .

Eph.1:4

Now, God saves us by his marvelous grace. And then he molds us by his rod of discipline. And he sets a difficult course before us and he says, "Now, run the race."

Now it seems that your course is different than my course. And God has set a very specific course for each of us to run according to each of our needs. Some of us are more stubborn and resistant than others, and our course may be harder, our discipline may be more severe. But we all have

a course and if God has saved us, then he follows us daily with his rod and by his discipline he keeps us on the course.

The Example of Jesus

Now we saw last time that one of our principle duties in this life, while we are running the course that is set before us, is to keep our eyes on the example that was set for us by Jesus himself.

I think that many times when we think of the example of Jesus, we think to ourselves that it is really not a fair comparison because Jesus was the Son of God. We think that he had unfair advantages.

It is true that he had no sin nature. But in every other way, Jesus became like us. He was a man. He was a man with feelings. He was a man with nerve endings that felt pain. He was a man who felt emotions like sorrow and anguish. He was a man who did not hold onto the advantages and comforts of his divinity, which he enjoyed in heaven, but he let go of them in order to become a man and to suffer in every way as a man.

And Jesus ran his race. He ran it from start to finish. And he ran it by faith. Jesus believed in the promises of the Father. And with those promises in mind, Jesus ran the course that was set before him.

This was the hardest of courses that Jesus ran. It was the course of highest difficulty. And he showed us how the course must be run. It must be run with patience and with endurance. And most importantly, the course must be finished. No matter what difficulties there are along the way, the race must be run to completion.

Jesus reached the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before his crucifixion. And he was sorely tempted on this night to drop out of the race. He prayed,

If it be possible let this cup pass from me.

He knew that this night would be the longest night of his life. This night he would be beaten and scourged and the flesh would be torn from his body. And he knew that he would be nailed to a cross the next morning where he would suffer for six hours. And he knew that the sins of his

people would be laid to his account and that he would suffer the wrath of the Father.

But with his eyes on the finish line, Jesus said,

Not my will but Thine be done.

And it says in verse three of our text:

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

Now the last phrase of this verse suggests that we are always subject to growing weary and fainting in our Christian race. The Christian life is a long race and every runner runs the risk of getting tired and dropping out.

Example: Have you ever seen runners who are running a marathon. At first they seem fresh. But as the race goes on, their faces begin to show the pain. Their breathing becomes heavier and their legs get a little wobbly. And some of the runners drop out of the race because of the pain. Now especially when they round that last turn and they are straining to win the race, you see how their whole body suffers and their face shows the toll that the race has taken on their bodies.

But, if God has saved us and set the course before us, then we cannot drop out of the race. The race is won by faith. To drop out of the race is to abandon the faith. And to abandon the faith is to turn your back on Christ. And to turn your back on Christ is to admit that you are not saved after all.

And so, it is not an option to back out of the race. Our duty is to look to Christ as our great example. He ran and completed his race and therefore it is our duty to run ours to completion. So, it says,

Consider him that endured . . . lest ye be wearied and faint.

Now if you ever are tempted to back out of the race; if you are wearied with your trials and troubles; and if you are about to faint, then you should consider that

Jesus resisted temptations even unto death

Whatever our trials are, we have not had troubles like Jesus had. We are still here on this earth. We have not yet been slain for our faith. It says,

Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. (v.4)

You know, when we go through troubles, it is sometimes helpful if we know that we are not the only ones. It is helpful to consider those who have gone before.

If you have cancer, sometimes it is helpful to consider all those who have endured the disease before you. Some were able to survive and this is a ray of hope for you. And even those who eventually fell to the disease are a comfort to you, because they shared in your experience.

And Jesus endured even unto death so that you might be comforted in your trials.

But there is another comforting principle at work when you are enduring hardship in the Christian life and that is,
The Lord Chastens His Children

Are you about ready to faint? Then, you need to remember that you are sons of daughters of the Lord and he chastens his children.

Have you forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. (v.5)

Now there is a sound principle in God's Word that says that if God loves you, he will chasten you.

My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction.

Prov.3:11, 12

Now I would suggest to you that in Hebrews 12, when it is talking about the discipline of the Lord, it is still speaking under the metaphor of a

race. The race is begun in Hebrews 12:1 and if you notice in verse 12, the race is still in view. It says,

Lift up the hands that hang down and the feeble knees and make straight paths for your feet.

Example: Now when you are fresh in the race, you run with your elbows bent and your hands high and you swing your arms for balance and momentum and you lift your knees high so that each stride carries you a long distance. We use to have a track coach who would always yell at us to lift those knees and keep them high. And also, when you get tired in a race, you begin to fade out into other lanes. You wobble left or right and you don't run a straight course.

But look what the writer of Hebrews tells us.

Lift up the hands that hang down and the feeble knees and make straight paths for your feet.

Do you see how we are still under the race metaphor?

Now when it says despise not the chastening of the Lord, the picture here is of the Lord following behind you in the Christian race. And he follows along with a rod in his hand. And when you are tempted to go around the hurdle instead of over it, he takes his rod and corrects you. When you are tempted to leave the course, his rod keeps you in your lane.

Now when those in the world run through life, they take short cuts and they do not follow the course. When they encounter trouble, they find relief by deceit and deception and by manipulation and by many other sinful devices. But Jesus follows those whom he loves with his rod and he trains us to run the course. He trains us to run the race in holiness and with moral purity.

It is his rod many times that we feel upon our backs. It is his chastening rod that rebukes us and corrects our path. And when you feel his rod upon your back, verse 5 says,

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children. My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint

when thou art rebuked of him.

So, we should learn here that if we are in the Christian race, then there will be a disciplinarian that follows us and he will correct our path as needed.

Now here is what we should learn about the Lord's chastening from this passage:

I. The Lord chastens.

Sometimes we think that if the Lord has saved us, then all is well and he will prop us up on a soft pillow and bring us our daily food and that he will serve us in our ease and comfort.

But then, as we move through life, we begin to understand that the Lord chastens. He will not be content to allow us to lie on our couch of comfort. He will not be content to allow us to continue in our daily sins. He will not be content to allow us to go on in our selfish and unholy ways. But he will chasten us with his rod and he will get us up off of our couch. And when we sin, his rod will correct our practice. And when we think only of our things, his rod will turn our attention to his things.

And so, come to the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that the Christian life comes with a daily dose of discipline. For the Lord chastens.

The Lord Chastens Those He Loves

It should be well understood that the Lord does not chasten everyone. The Lord does not lay his rod to everyone's back.

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

Example: It is a very sad thing when children are born into homes where parents do not love them; where the parents are so self-absorbed that they really don't care what the children do as long as they stay out of the parents' way. And these children grow up with no discipline at all. They do whatever they want to do all day and all night. And there is no guiding hand at all.

But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. (v.8)

To not discipline a child is to disown him. It is to say, "You are not worthy of my love and so I leave you to your own devices." And the saddest children are those who have no discipline for they know that they are not loved.

And if God did not discipline us, then we would be unloved. If there are no stripes upon your backs, then he does not love you. If you sin freely day after day and there is no scourging, then he does not care for you.

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? (v.6,7)

The Chastening of God is Better Than the Chastening of a Human Father

Now you will see in verses 9 and 10 that God's chastening is compared to the chastening of a human father.

Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

I. Human fathers are given reverence.

The general rule is that fathers are charged with correcting their children and when they do so, they are given respect or reverence. Fathers have a duty to correct their children and children have a duty to reverence their fathers under such correction.

This is the normal principle that should abide in every home. The correction that is administered by the father is an act of love toward the child and is an act of obedience to God. God has charged the father with correcting his children. And when the father does so, then it puts him in a position of honor. He is doing what he should do.

Now some children, when they are corrected, they become even more rebellious and even more insubordinate. They may go to their room

and slam the door and sulk. Or they may threaten to run away. And when they do so, they just multiply their wrongs. Whatever they did to merit the discipline is now compounded because they resist the discipline.

But the normal principle is that when a child is justly disciplined, he recognizes the error of his behavior and he highly respects his father for correcting him.

That is the way it is in human family relations. And it is even more so as between God and his children. God is even more righteous than human fathers. God is even more just. God is even more correct in disciplining his children. And therefore, if we give respect to our human fathers, then we should give even more respect to our heavenly Father when he brings out the rod of correction.

Note: What does it mean when it says, "And live?" (v.9)

Interestingly, under the law of Moses, there was a very harsh way of dealing with rebellious children. (See Deut.21:18-21)

And so, under the law, the penalty for not being in subjection to parents was death.

On the other hand, there was a better way for children, and that way was obedience and subjection to their parents. And this was the way to live instead of die under the law.

And perhaps that is what is referred to here in Hebrews 12:9. Failure to receive discipline was physical death under the law and failure to receive the discipline of God rightly is also a death principle.

When God corrects us, it is life to the soul to humbly submit to his correction and to reverence Him.

So, human fathers are given reverence. Likewise, God should be honored when he disciplines us.

But there is another comparison in verse 10.

II. Human fathers disciplined us with respect to a few days.

Now, apparently this does not mean that when we disobeyed that spanked us for a few days. Now it may seem like a few days to the child, but usually the rod of discipline is only for a minute or so.

And it apparently does not mean that a father only has disciplinary control over his child for a few days or a few years.

What it means is that when a father is correcting his child, he is doing so with an eye to the relatively few days of this life. He is trying to correct his child for the benefit of this life. He is trying to teach him how to live in this life. And perhaps it will improve the child for the 70 or 80 years that he lives in this life.

On the other hand, the discipline of God has eternal consequences. It is not a few days that is in view, but it is correction for all eternity. And therefore the discipline of God is of infinite value compared to the correction of earthly fathers.

III. Human fathers sometimes disciplined us “after their own pleasure.”

Now good fathers will often tell their children, “This is going to hurt me more than you.”

But unfortunately, oftentimes human fathers are not perfect in their discipline. Sometimes discipline is administered out of anger; sometimes hastily and without thought; sometimes it is done unfairly or unjustly.

But compare God’s discipline to that. God’s discipline is always just. It is always appropriate. It is always done with the profit of the child in mind. And it is always done to promote holiness. (v.10)

The Chastening of God is Grievous for the moment but fruitful in the end