

“Thanks, I Needed That!”

Hebrews 12:5a-11

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

“Hey dad, thanks for making me pay for that window I broke with my allowance money. I know it will take months, but it will teach me to be more responsible when I’m playing games with my friends from now on!” “Wow mom, thanks for taking my phone away for a week. I know I will miss it, but it will remind me that having a phone is a privilege, that you pay for most of it, and that when I use it the way I did, it’s really hurtful to others and disrespectful to you. Your actions will help me think before I post in the future!” “Dad, thanks for making me go and apologize to our neighbor whose house I helped egg last week! It will be very uncomfortable, but it will make me take responsibility for the things I do and admit when I am wrong which will help me build more solid relationships with people in the future.” “Mom and dad, thanks for canceling our vacation to Disney and going camping nearby for a week instead because our car broke down and the repair cost so much! It will help me accept that sometimes I can’t follow through on my plans because circumstances beyond my control change, and it will help me to appreciate that time with the family is valuable no matter how much or how little money we spend.” “Thanks mom, thanks dad, I needed that!” What child or teenager ever said anything like this to a parent at the moment of discipline? Oh, they may accept the discipline, but usually it’s with a sour face. Yet two, four, ten years later, often times we change our tune don’t we? And while we probably don’t write to tell our parents this, we really do come to appreciate their efforts to discipline us because they do teach us valuable life lessons and prevent us from bringing greater hurts on ourselves later in life. And that reality helps us to be patient, and to empathize with our children when we discipline them. We say things like, “I know you might not like what we’re doing now, but one day you’ll understand.” And we mean it don’t we? It isn’t fun to discipline our children, but we do it because we want our kids to be wise, to be blessed. To learn about life, so they don’t hurt in a far bigger way. This has been true for as long as there have been parents and children. As we study the Bible today, we see that God uses this life experience (parental discipline) that we know so well to help us understand and appreciate a different kind of discipline – God’s.

Hebrews 12:5-11 “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.” ⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹ 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! ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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.

This Passage starts with a quote from another book of the Bible, the book of Proverbs. **“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”** But this begs the question, “How do I know that God is disciplining me?” “Pastor Weigand, can you come out fishing with me tomorrow?” “No, sorry, God grounded me for two days because I said some bad words.” “Robin, why are you crying?” “Well, God made my boyfriend break up with me because I cheated on my final math exam.” “Fred, why the long face?” “Well, God gave me cancer because I cheated on my taxes.” That isn’t the way it works. First off, God doesn’t tell us with words “this is discipline.” And he doesn’t operate in a tat for tat manner, delivering some sort of payback for each misdeed. Now sometimes our minds go there – the karma-like approach that believes when something bad happens, it’s God getting me back for a bad thing I did. Jesus addresses this misunderstanding in Luke chapter 13. There had been some people executed and their blood was mixed with the blood of the sacrifices – a particularly brutal display. And another recent tragedy – a group a people were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them. Jesus knew that many assumed that these kinds of things were God paying people back for their sin. Listen to what he says: **About that time some people came up and told him**

about the Galileans Pilate had killed while they were at worship, mixing their blood with the blood of the sacrifices on the altar. Jesus responded, “Do you think those murdered Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans? Not at all. Unless you turn to God, you, too, will die. And those eighteen in Jerusalem the other day, the ones crushed and killed when the Tower of Siloam collapsed and fell on them, do you think they were worse citizens than all other Jerusalemites? Not at all. Unless you turn to God, you, too, will die.” Hardship or tragedy isn’t God’s tit for tat punishment, but look what Jesus DOES say. **Unless you turn to God, you too will die.** What Jesus does want us to understand are that these kinds of things are God’s call to attention, his act of teaching us to trust him and stay faithful to him so that we receive his promise of forgiveness and heaven.

That helps us explain how God wants us to look at hardship. He implores us to look at every hardship as discipline. In other words, any hardship, whatever it is, understand it as something God intends to use to teach us in a way that will bless us. He’s allowing it to teach us better to follow him, and what happens when we follow him? Verse 10, **that we may share in his holiness.** And more than that, verse 11: **It produces a harvest of righteousness.**

Can you think of a hardship that was not pleasant at the time, but that brought you closer in as a follower of Jesus? Over the past two years I have been blessed to have some long and in-depth conversations with a number of our members who are cancer survivors. More recently, I’ve been blessed to have some long in-depth conversations with those who have lost spouses. Oh, man that’s hard stuff, and I wonder, “How would I handle this.” But all of them have shared how God has used it to strengthen their personal bond with him. And you talk about a harvest of righteousness, wow, I certainly do see it! It’s helped me as a pastor just to have a greater awareness of others. It’s helped them to more freely share their faith and think in terms of eternity instead of just now. “Thanks God I needed that!”

I think of close relative of mine, a pastor who struggles with chronic seasonal depression. Hard at the time. Wow, yes! Has it brought him closer in his walk with Jesus? Yes, and the harvest of righteousness – again, it’s helped me in ministry, and I know it’s helped other pastors with similar struggles. Harvest of righteousness: me, fellow pastors. God’s discipline, hard at the time, but look what he’s don’t with it? “Thanks God, I needed that!” You can probably think of occasions too where in time you appreciated how God used hardship to call you to attention and bring you closer in your walk with him. The boyfriend or girlfriend breaks up with you, and it’s hard – really hard, but in time you see how it was good for the both of you, how maybe you were finding a little too much of your identity in that relationship instead of as a child of God, or you just found in time that God allowed a different person into your life that was even more a blessing. Maybe it’s the job you lost that ended up making you take a closer look at the time you spent with your God and with your family, and the shift in focus was a blessing to all, and on top of that you got a new job. “Thanks God I needed that!” Now let’s be honest, just like with parents and kids, the realization of discipline comes more easily with the passage of time. But what is the big lesson God is looking to teach here? Accept that God is going use your present hardship even before he has revealed exactly how. Shift from recognizing in hindsight, “Thanks, God I needed that” to trusting in the present – in the moment of hardship, “Thanks God, I need this – help me see the blessing you have in mind.” That is a hallmark of deep Christian maturity, one I cannot claim to have reached, but God has blessed me to see it in others. I’ve listened to a cancer patient right on the heels of the diagnosis say, “I wonder what God will do with this blessing.” I’ve heard firsthand a Christian man who lost his job say – God just has something better in mind even before that “something” is known. I’ve been in the presence of a Christian couple, in the aftermath of the financing for their dream home failing say, “God knows that we wouldn’t have been a blessing for us.” And their actions before and after those words showed that this wasn’t just lip service. Wow, God bless me with that kind of maturity. Think of the stress and worrying it saves! Think of the peace it brings both to us and to those around us... “Oh that’s right, that’s what God wants, that’s what God has in mind.”

“Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children... 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. Strive for that maturity, pray for that maturity that at the time of hardship says with all sincerity, “Thanks God, I need this!” AMEN.