



God Is Treating You As Sons

Series: Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul

Hebrews 12:4-17

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We are looking at a significantly larger portion of Scripture than usual this morning and let me explain why. This letter to the Hebrews was originally a sermon, modified into letter-form, and then given to the Hebrew Christians in Rome. And a sermon has a specific ebb and flow to it, a specific progression that is different from, say, one of the gospels or the Book of Acts. It's building to a climax, building toward what should be life-changing application and exhortation and that is what we have here in this section that we are looking at this morning. Yes, we still have another chapter and a half to cover after this morning, and yes, there is some great stuff yet to come, but this section that we are looking at really is the summit of this sermon – the main point that the writer of Hebrews desperately wants to press home to the hearts of this congregation that he loves so dearly.

Consider this congregation again. The vast majority of them were ethnically Jewish and had been raised under the Jewish system of Moses' Law and the temple sacrifices. But then they heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of grace and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, God's Son. They had become convinced, most of them anyway, of the truth about Jesus Christ – that He is the radiance of the glory of God, God-incarnate, higher than the angels, far greater than Moses, more glorious than all of the priests in Israel's history. They had been convinced, most of them, of His perfect sinlessness, of His mission to destroy the works of Satan and to defeat sin and death, of the perfect obedience to the Law that He had lived in their place – living the life that none of us can live, convinced that as the chosen one of God Jesus had taken their place and offered Himself as the final sacrifice for sin. They had become convinced that He had paid the debt they owed to God for their unrighteousness, suffered the wrath that they deserved and by His blood had cleansed them from all of their sins. They were convinced, most of them, that by His perfect and redeeming sacrifice, Jesus had made them, through faith, children of the Living God and brothers and sisters with Him. Jesus had done it all in joyful obedience to the will of the Father, motivated by the joy of accomplishing the Father's will to rescue rebels and make them worshippers of God,

motivated by the joy of bringing many sons and daughters to glory. This was what they had believed.

When they first came to faith in Christ, like any of us who are saved, Jesus filled their vision. They were filled with joy, with amazement, with awe that God would save such as them. But then they began to experience the cost of knowing and following Christ. Many of their close family bonds were broken over their faith in and devotion to this Messiah who had made the Jewish religion obsolete. They became estranged from lifelong friends over their faith in Christ. Some lost jobs and others lost possessions. They began to experience ostracism from the society at large, the loss of position and reputation, becoming subject to the growing persecution from a government and society that rejected Christ altogether. They were publically exposed to mocking and ridicule, to verbal and physical affliction. Following Christ was hard. As a result, many of those who at first had professed faith in Christ began to fall away, to go back to the Jewish religion, to seek to re-ingratiate themselves to the society and to their friends and family by decisively turning away from Christ, either openly and publically or by falling away from Christ by compromising the truth.

Some that remained faithful to Christ threatened to become disillusioned, to be discouraged, to become disheartened and to give it all up. Why was following Christ so hard? They were living out the words of Christ, ***“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”*** (Luke 9:23–26, ESV) God’s saving grace is free, but the cost of following Christ in this world is real.

The truth is that following Christ, being a Christian, is not easy and the book of Hebrews is a very mature and sober and honest word to us when it speaks of the ongoing hardship and struggle, the challenge and the testing of running the race, fighting the fight, and finishing the race well. But it is also mature, and joyful, and encouraging in telling us that the reward of finishing the race is worth far more than any cost associated with faithfulness to Christ – eternal life, eternal joy, eternal reward, eternal blessing – glorious blessing that makes every temporal cost look like a pittance, like chickenfeed, like nothing.

So, these verses that we are looking at this morning arise from the heart of a pastor that desires that his church would think rightly, think biblically, about the troubles and hardships that they were experiencing. Things were not getting any easier for these Hebrew Christians, and I know that we can relate to that, right? This church was enduring hardship, seemingly never-ending struggle, persecution from without and defections from within and the pastor's main concern is that they would not draw the wrong conclusion from their trials and believe that they were somehow out of favor with God. They needed the right perspective and they needed to respond appropriately and that's what we are going to look at this morning. And, surprisingly, he begins in this text with a somewhat surprising rebuke and a vital reminder.

A Somewhat Surprising Rebuke and a Vital Reminder (4-7b) Look at what the pastor says to these stressed-out and struggling believers. He says, ***“In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons.”*** (Hebrews 12:4–7, ESV)

In our modern, and quite honestly, softer age, we are tempted to think that these words from the pastor are a little harsh, ***In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*** That doesn't sound very caring or understanding, does it? But this pastor understands that it will do his congregation no good to be given to self-pity, to feel badly for themselves. He says in essence, “Things are not as bad as they seem, not as bad as you suppose. No one has died for his or her faith in Christ, not yet. Jesus, however, in **His** battle with sin died in order to remain faithful to God, shed His blood and died a redeeming death in order to save you. I just told you about some OT saints who had been stoned, sawn in two, and killed with sword for being faithful to the Lord. It may come to that for you. The Christian life is an intense battle, a life and death struggle against the forces of evil. It was for Jesus and it will be for you. The servant is not greater than his master. So get your eyes off your present circumstances, off yourself, and onto Christ; do not be overcome with self-pity or discouragement, and have the right perspective on your life.”

And how was that right perspective going to happen? By remembering and by trusting in truth that they already knew, namely this exhortation, taken from Proverbs 3:11-12, **“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons.** In other words, what they needed to see, what they needed to believe, what would change their entire perspective on their circumstances was this reality: All that they were enduring – the trials, the tests, the hardships, the training, the providential circumstances of their lives– was all designed by and applied by God for their ultimate good. As sons and daughters of a Sovereign God who rules all things according to His will, everything that we face is the designed discipline of God to further our growth in grace, to put our sinfulness to death, to grow us in holiness and to make us more and more into the image of Christ – which is the goal of the gospel. Paul wrote, **“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”** (Romans 8:28–30, ESV) That is what God was doing in them and it’s what God is doing in us and we need to believe that with all of our hearts.

Now let’s break this down a little bit. He says, **“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”** Now there are two kinds of discipline that are in view in this text. It’s very important that we see that. There is, first, what we might all formative discipline or training in righteousness – that’s what the word, “discipline” speaks of. It is the idea of the every-day training, teaching and instructing of someone to maturity. The second view is that of corrective discipline, of punishment and rebuke, of a strong hand applied, spanking or whipping, in order to discipline and correct behavior and attitude. That’s the idea behind the words “reproved” and “chastises.” Both of these things, God uses in our lives, to make us grow into maturity, to conquer sinful patterns, and to grow into holiness. The fight of faith, this training and correction, the testing and hardship, is all a part of being a child of God. It is all part of God’s providential ordering of our lives for our good.

And he does all of this out of love. Let me say that again. He does it all – formative discipline and corrective rebuke – out of love. For those how are truly saved through faith in Christ, discipline is not an expression of the wrath of God. Christ’s death for us has extinguished

the wrath of God against our sins forever. The writer of Hebrews has already reminded us that Jesus **“had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”** (Hebrews 2:17, ESV) Jesus, in our place, has paid the penalty for our sins once and for all. God’s discipline in our lives is not for the purpose of judicial punishment for our sins, but for the purpose of deepening our relationship to God, growing us in holiness, growing our love, our faith, and our dependence upon Him. Do you see that? And what is so important is how we respond to God’s discipline in our lives, how we respond to His training and correction. God has a Fatherly design and purpose in our lives.

That’s why, first, we are not to **regard lightly the discipline of the Lord**. We are not to regard lightly the regular training and instruction of the Lord – his formative discipline. Don’t treat with contempt, don’t roll your eyes at, and don’t regard as unimportant or as a nuisance or as restrictive the formative discipline of the Lord. If you have kids, you have probably seen this before or as a kid you have probably done this with your parent’s instruction. Don’t do it. God gives us His moral commands in Scripture, commands us to worship Him, the grace of the preaching and application of the Word of God, the grace of brothers and sisters to exhort us to good works, the grace of confession and repentance of sin, the grace of prayer to make us strong. He tests us, tests our faithfulness to those things, in order to strengthen us in Christ. The positive training of God is a worthwhile thing. It is a grace from the Lord, a demonstration of His love and care. How you “turn out” matters to God.

Second, we are not to be **weary when reproved by him**. Sometimes God has to correct us for specific sin in our lives. He has to bring His hand to bear against us and “spank” us if you will in order to put our affection for sin to death. He has to correct us and will not allow us to continue in a certain sin that is plaguing us. God does this in a number of ways. He withdraws the joy of our salvation. He may orchestrate circumstances and consequences that are painful. Sometimes he withdraws His fellowship and makes the heavens like brass when we pray. Other times he disrupts our unity with other believers or removes our ability to hear His Word clearly. Other times He makes our going hard, afflicting us. There are many believers who can testify that the only way that God got through to them in their sin was to put them through a particularly painful ordeal in order to bring them to repentance and deal with their sin and purge it from their lives. We have to see things like the Psalmist wrote, **“You have dealt well with your servant, O Lord, according to your word. Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.”** (Psalm 119:65–67, ESV) God uses corrective

discipline to bring us to our senses and to teach us what AW Tozer explained in this way, “We must hide our unholiness in the wounds of Christ as Moses hid in the cleft of the Rock while the glory of God passed by. We must all take refuge from God in God. Above all, we must believe that God sees us perfect in His Son while He disciplines and chastens and purges us so that we may be partakers of His holiness.” God’s good discipline – both formative and corrective – pushes us toward Him. We are not to grow weary, to become depressed or hopeless or lose heart or see God as a harsh taskmaster, but to respond to his discipline properly and to see in it His love for us.

The way that God works in our lives – the instruction and training, the testing and trial, the hardships that we face for following Him, the clear boundaries that He establishes, the correction and chastening that He brings – is the evidence of His loving care, His purpose that to mature us and grow us and make us like Jesus Christ. He disciplines those He loves and He receives – does not cast off or away as too much trouble – but receives those whom He reproves and chastises.

All of the circumstances of life – the blessing of good, the blessing of testing, the blessing of correction – all of these things are being designed and used by God for our ultimate good, to draw us to Him, to make us more like Jesus Christ, to serve His purpose of growing us up in grace. Our first response to God’s discipline and His providence in our lives must be to see it as the God-appointed way of bring us to spiritual maturity, so that we will not be tossed to and fro by every emotion and whim and hardship that that we face. We must learn to stand firmly in the Lord, trusting in Him and in His good purpose in us. The Hebrew Christians needed to believe that and so do we – when it is good and when it is hard. But we especially need reminded of this when the circumstances that God ordains for our lives are difficult and trying and that’s why the pastor gives us a comparison between our earthly fathers and our Heavenly Father.

Our Earthly Fathers and Our Heavenly Father – A Comparison (7c-11) He says, ***“For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all***

discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” (Hebrews 12:7–11, ESV)

Now do you see what he is doing here? This training, discipline, testing, reproof, chastisement, and correction, he says, are evidence that you are a child of God. If God does not train us to renounce ungodliness; if He does not correct disobedience, then the truth is that we do not belong to God. If we are left without discipline – formative and corrective – we are not his true children. Discipline is evidence of God’s love for us and that we are His own in a special way. Think about it like this. I love kids and I have been around tons of them – in church, at VBS, coaching – a bunch of kids. I have literally known hundreds and hundreds of kids. I have instructed and trained kids, and on occasion I have corrected and disciplined kids that were out of line. But there are only five children in this whole world that I have been engaged in disciplining regularly and consistently – my own. My love for them as my children motivates me to discipline them – formatively and correctively – for their good. And that discipline is evidence that I love them and that they belong to me.

Now the way the pastor sets this up is by comparing earthly fathers with our Heavenly Father and the underlying assumption is that our fathers loved us enough and were responsible enough to discipline us and that we honored that and were/are grateful and we respect them for it. That’s the assumption. I know that this is not true of all fathers but that is the idea here. Our earthly fathers did what? Well they disciplined us for a while, when we lived under their roofs, teaching us and correcting us to bring us to a place of maturity, to a level that seemed best to them. They didn’t always do it perfectly or completely consistently but they tried. They did what seemed best to them.

But God disciplines us, not merely for a time but for our entire lives and His discipline is perfect, is for our eternal good, for our ultimate good beyond this life. He disciplines us not so that we would be “good people” but so that we would share in His holiness, so that we would be godly, so that we would share in His character and be like Christ. JI Packer explains this perfectly. He says, “In this world, royal children have to undergo extra training and discipline, which other children escape, in order to fit them for their high destiny. It is the same with the children of the King of kings. The clue to understanding all His dealings with them is to remember that throughout their lives, He is training them for what awaits them, and chiseling them into the image of Christ.” Now that’s not always easy.

That's why the pastor says, ***For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*** Discipline – both formative and corrective – seems to be a hardship, a hassle, confining and restricting at times. The trials and the testing of our faith, for the moment, can seem painful and not pleasant. That's true. But here's the thing, the yield, the result, is worth it – the peaceful fruit of righteousness. What is in view here is not the objective righteousness with God that we have through faith in Christ, the righteousness that is applied to our account at salvation, but rather, the subjective, practical, every-day, joy and pleasure and the fruit of real righteousness. Isaiah describes it this way, ***“And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.” (Isaiah 32:17, ESV)*** Peace – the idea is Shalom – the Hebrew idea of wholeness and soundness. That is the goal of God's discipline in our lives. A wholeness, spiritual integrity and character. Fruit that brings this kind of peace in our lives.

God is at work in all of the circumstances of our lives, he is fashioning all of the moments of our lives. If we are Christians, everything that we experience – the training, the instruction, the testing, the trial, the hardships, the successes, the failures, the correction and reproof – is fashioned by the loving hand of our Sovereign God, not to destroy us or ruin our lives, but for our ultimate good and for our everyday peace and wholeness. We must believe this to be true and we need to respond to God accordingly. Not treating His discipline lightly, as if it is of no worth, or restrictive. Not growing weary, despondent, or discouraged as if God does not love us. Refusing to respond to God's hand and rebelling against His authority, against His instruction, against accountability and correction – which will only invite more discipline – but responding with faith, with gratefulness that God cares about us as He does, believing that His paths are right, true, and good, that the path on which He has us is purposeful, believing that His heart is for us, to prosper us, to strengthen and mature us for our own good. It is an entirely different view than that of the world. How we respond matters. And that's why the writer of Hebrews closes this text by telling the Hebrews, and us, how we should respond. He applies this text to them and calls them to a response. He calls us to a response. So here, in these final few verses, is the application of this text for us today.

Application and Exhortation (12-17) From this right perspective on God's active discipline in our lives, the pastor calls the Hebrews and us to action saying, first, ***“Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so***

that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.” (Hebrews 12:12–13, ESV)

The pastor is saying, in essence, to “toughen up, “ “to keep on keeping on.” The telltale body language of someone that is fading fast in a race are drooping hands and wobbly knees. The pastor uses these phrases metaphorically to describe someone who is overwhelmed with life, who is despairing, who is depressed and discouraged. To those who were fading from the race, the pastor is saying, “Life is not overwhelming, nor is it impossible. Everything that you are facing, every trial, every test, every hardship, even persecution – those things are lovingly designed and applied by God to make you grow in Christ, to make you depend upon him, to discipline and develop your character, so, straighten up (that’s the literal meaning of strengthen) and get on the straight paths that God has established by His Word, the way in which you are to run and keep going.” Now, look, we know from the rest of this book that he is not promoting a “do-it-yourself,” “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” kind of Christian life. We must have God’s empowering grace to run well, but there is a need for muscular Christianity, there is a need for us to run tough. ***“Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.” (Proverbs 4:26–27, ESV)*** If we run the race with confidence that all that God is doing is not meant to destroy us by to make us more like Christ, what has been out of joint, will be healed. So run tough, run confident of God’s love for you and His gracious providential discipline that is designed for your good and don’t quit.

Then he says, ***“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14, ESV)*** He is telling them and us, specifically, to focus on two things – peace and holiness. Strive for peace, for proper relationships that please Christ. Strive for peace with others that is rooted in righteousness and gospel grace. Don’t be the source of strife or division and thereby try to undermine the work of God in you and in others. People like that are impediments to running the race. Don’t be like that.

Now, he has in view here both our lives inside and outside of the church. Paul wrote starting in Romans 12:18, ***“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:18–21, ESV)*** The Hebrew Christians needed to hear that and so do we. Not everyone in society will want to be at peace with Christians, but we must do our best to be peaceable. Leave the results to the Lord. You do good to everyone that you can and trust God to work it out.

Unfortunately the same is true among the professing people of God. Sometimes people cling to bitterness, hatred and unforgiveness and though you may try, you can't do anything to reconcile with them. That too, you must leave in the hands of the Lord, but do not allow it to hamper your race of faith. As much as you can, strive for and pursue peace. In this striving for peace, however, what we cannot ever do is to compromise obedience to God, to sacrifice truth for a false peace, to compromise righteousness, or act in a worldly manner. That's why the pastor links this striving for peace with striving for holiness.

He says strive for ***the holiness without which no one will see the Lord***. Strive to be like Jesus Christ in your mind, your heart and your actions. Now understand something. It is not that our salvation is won by our personal holiness, but as we have said before, salvation compels out striving for holiness because God's very purpose in saving us is that we might be conformed to the image of His Son. We will never be perfectly holy in this life, right? That is why we need Jesus who was holy for us, in our behalf, having won for us acceptance with God through His perfect life and saving death on the cross. We are not saved by our works, but rather by the perfect work of Jesus Christ, but by the power of His Spirit dwelling in us, we should be striving for greater and greater conformity to His character. Holiness is necessary for us to be saved. Personal holiness is not these means by which we are accepted by God, since we justified by faith in Christ alone, apart from our works. But it is the consequence of our acceptance with God. As the writer of Hebrews puts it, ***“For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”*** (Hebrews 10:14, ESV) If God is at work, if His discipline of us, the circumstances and providences of our lives are for the purpose of making us holy, then strive to be holy. How we walk now, as God is making so clear, matters. ***“For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”*** (Galatians 6:8, ESV) Holiness is our preparation for heaven and the backbone of perseverance. Yes we will fall, but don't stay there. ***“The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in his way; though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand.”*** (Psalm 37:23–24, ESV) These two things – peace and holiness – are the goal of God's discipline. Don't bow up against God, but be a glad participant in the program. Make peace and pursue holiness.

To this he adds, ***“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God;”*** (Hebrews 12:15a, ESV) Lest we keep our focus only upon ourselves, the pastor expands our vision from ourselves

to everyone else who names the name of Christ. It is not just by grace you run hard and run tough, the calling is to do it together. Jesus said, **“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”** (Matthew 7:13–14, ESV) The going is hard, no doubt about it, so the pastor exhorts us to look out for one another and make sure that no one fails to obtain the grace of God, that no-one falls behind, that no-one falls away. The idea is looking out for and caring for one another along the way. When we see someone who is struggling to keep up, encourage and remind them of God’s character and providential love and care for them. When we see our brother or sister in sin, or failing to abide in the Word, or absenting themselves from the body of Christ – don’t just let it slide, but encourage them and challenge them. Don’t just let people drift away or become disheartened or disconnected. No, you cannot change their heart, but you do all you can to encourage them to keep on. Make it hard for them to quit. Keep watch on your other fellow runners.

Moreover, he says, **“See to it... that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;”** (Hebrews 12:15b, ESV) In other words, be vigilant for the well-being of the church. This phrase “root of bitterness” comes from Deuteronomy 29:18 where Moses warns, **“Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit,”** (Deuteronomy 29:18, ESV) Look out for those people whose hearts are turning away from God in the sense that they rebel against His discipline and are becoming bitter against His discipline in their lives. Don’t give yourself to those people. Don’t invest yourself in these relationships. They are a subtle poison to the flock. They are not always obvious – a root grows slowly and only reveals itself over time. But it becomes obvious over time that the motivating principle for such people is not faithfulness to Christ or to His church. The orientation of their lives is wrong; their priorities are off; they think ultimately only about themselves. The categories in which they think and speak make the bitterness in their heart evident. They are self-focused and by their self-absorption fracture the flock of God. Be vigilant lest you be taken in by their subtleties.

Then, last he says, see to it **“that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.”** (Hebrews 12:16–17, ESV) He warns us to be on guard against the crippling influence of

sensuality and godlessness, using Esau as the prime example. You remember Esau. He is an example of a man who did not rightly value God or God's covenant, His grace, or His Word. He is the one who sold his birthright for a bowl of soup. His orientation of life was sensual and earth-bound. He is the archetype of the man or woman who, to his or her own destruction, pursues carnal cravings of all sorts, sexual and otherwise, rather than spiritual blessing. Later he felt remorse and grief over the waste he had made of his life, but repentance escaped him, even though he cried over his consequences. Physical appetites meant more to him than spiritual promises, his pleasure and ease meant more to him than his soul. Look out for you and for others that you do not tread his worthless path.

Beloved, these words this morning are serious words meant to reorient and refocus our lives. We have been given a great salvation in Jesus Christ, one that saves us from the wrath of God against our sin and one that sets us at odds with the world and with sin. God, as a kind and loving Father who cares deeply for our souls, is providentially at work in every circumstance of our lives to discipline and to make us more and more into the image of Christ. He is treating us like sons and daughters. The way is not always easy but it is always worth it in the end. Let us not regard lightly His discipline nor grow weary by His correction. Instead let us pursue the goal for which He has laid hold of us in Christ – spiritual maturity and the growth of Christ's character in our lives. Let us not be downcast or discouraged, but toughen up, by grace, and run the course that is before us. Let us do it by striving for peace and for holiness, by looking out for our brothers and sisters in Christ and being vigilant to avoid the things – a root of bitterness and a sensual and earthbound focus – that will throw us off course. Let us run with faith and grace empowered determination, the course that God has laid out for us and make Christ's name great in our lives, in our church, and in this world.

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