Hebrews 12 Trust and honour God that he uses trials for our good

If you are a sports fan, you will be watching a lot of persevering. Athletes who get to the final length of the pool, the final lap of the track, the final round of the fight – they are already exhausted, they have already spent so much energy, but to finish, they will have to endure. They will have to persevere.

This section is about persevering, keeping going. The Christians needed to persevere because it was hard. They were suffering for being a Christian.

* Not the suffering of living in a broken world. In the pandemic, Christians as well as non-Christians are catching the virus and some are dying from it. There is suffering that comes from living in a fallen world.
* This is not about the suffering as a result of their bad choices. Christians often make wrong or foolish choices and suffer from it. That is another cause of suffering. Hebrews is about suffering as a Christian.
* Suffering because you are a Christian. The most common topic about suffering in the NT is suffering for being a Christian. Suffering that comes BECAUSE you trust Jesus. Jesus came bring peace between God and His creatures – us – who were rejecting God.

He offered a new way for humans with God. Some people accept that offer. They recognise that they have been in the wrong. They thank God for his Son come to save them. They change sides. But Jesus expected that those who changed sides – who renounced the world – who came to Jesus, begging for forgiveness – would be hated as traitors by humanity that remains set against God.

* Think of a star football player – playing for premier league team – the fans chant his name when the ball comes to his feet, they roar when he comes on the pitch. Imagine he changes sides. In the middle of the game, he starts tackling his own team, he passes to the other side, he shouts encouragement when the other team do well, he even tries to shoot at goal for them. Would the fans cheer him? The world that is hostile to God does not look kindly on those who leave to join Jesus.
* That is the suffering that we are hearing about here. Listen again to the trouble the Christians suffered: READ Hebrews 10:32-34

It is tough to endure. It is hard to suffer. But Christians should expect it and keep on going.

READ v1

Persevere

To help us persevere, think of Jesus

READ v2

He endured, he put up with shame

READ v3

He endured opposition.

Remembering Jesus’ sufferings will help us endure ours.

The main point in this section is to understand what God is doing in that suffering.

In their bad experience, God is doing something good.

If they believe that, they will endure, they will persevere and in fact, they will grow.

God’s fatherly discipline of his children.

The word discipline is in every verse from verse 5 to verse 11.

**I just want to pause and talk about parenting for a moment.**

**This passage depends on a proper understanding of parenting.**

**Two lies about parents and children:**

**Parenting means controlling children. Parents *are* in charge. They *should* control their children. But being parents is more than that. It is to train your children. To equip them and prepare them. It is not good enough to keep them under control in your sight if they leave you and don’t have a clue how to live.**

**Parents are not to use Bible as an excuse to bully children. You can force children to obey but leave them hating. Parents are to train children. Sometimes that means they do what you say. Sometimes it means you punish them. But also, we should be explaining what we want, why we do things, helping them to learn.**

**Second lie: Children shouldn’t have to do anything parents tell them. All authority is harmful to us because it stops us expressing our true self. Children you are being trained in school and social media to question authority. The great lie is that you will find the best life by being authentic to yourself. In love for God, you admit your real self is not right. Submitting to those in charge will make you very different from your friends. It can be very hard – talk to other Christians about it.**

Parenting course?

This passage talks about the ultimate parent – about God.

this passage is God’s fatherly discipline of his children.

READ v4,5

Don’t lose heart when it is hard.

Hardship is not a sign that God has lost control or abandoned his people.

Instead, it is an expression of his fatherly discipline.

We tend to think discipline just means punishment and fines.

Sitting on the naughty stair, being grounded, missing out on a trip.

But discipline is for training – preparing, developing, growing.

When God disciplines, he ‘brings up’ his children and shapes them in the way he wants them to go.

Because of their commitment to God and his will, they experience physical suffering, friends and family shunning them and abuse from their opponents.

So why does he allow them to cause such hardship?

READ v6

We suffer opposition because God loves us – we can take comfort from that fact.

READ v7,8

If a father doesn’t bother to train a child, he doesn’t love that child. It looks like the child isn’t his.

It is a form of abuse when a father leaves the child alone – it is called neglect.

Neglected children don’t get taught to eat with a knife and fork; to dress themselves; in some cases, even how to speak. Their parents have not loved them, they have not trained them.

Having trials in life is a sign I belong to God.

If I never had trouble, if I always and only get what I want in a comfortable, successful life, I am not God’s child. He is leaving me alone.

How different this is from the prosperity gospel which claims God promises success, health and popularity.

READ V9

We should be glad and grateful to our parents for the training they gave us.

How much more should we respect and be in submission to him at all times.

How does human parenting compare to God’s?

READ v10

Human parenting will lack wisdom and is limited in its scope. But God’s parenting of us is determined by his perfect wisdom and is motivated by his concern for our eternal welfare.

They taught us to cross the road, to brush our teeth, to comb our hair.

We didn’t enjoy it at the time. But it was good for us.

Infants and toddlers complain and cry about potty training – but looking back on it now, I am very glad my parents taught that.

Who wishes their parents had not taught potty trained them?

READ v11

We do not enjoy God’s discipline. It hurts. But the outcome of discipline is a harvest of peace and righteousness.

How does it work? I am confronted with a choice – will I give in to the pressure, or will I stick with Jesus? God is training me to hold on to Jesus – strengthening my grip on him, loosening the world’s grip on me.

* The thing is to rely on God. The time will come when you will regard all this misery as a small price to pay for having been brought to that dependence. Meanwhile, the trouble is that relying on God has to begin all over again every day as if nothing has yet been done.
* Poster on the wall in our bedroom: God will not keep you from anything that makes you more like Jesus.
* My choice to trust God my Father loves me and will use this situation. As a Christian, you may enjoy of his word and relief of forgiveness. As a Christian, you may love to be in his work, seeing others grow. As a Christian, pray this pray – use what it takes to make me grow like Jesus? I love other things in my life too much – more than you – please lead me to love you more.

So, keep going and help each other keep going:

READ v12-13.

We must help each other keep going. Any who are lame in our team need us to help them along.

The passage ends with three warnings against giving up. Three warnings against deciding it is all too hard. Three warnings against rejecting the discipline.

* Don’t fall short of God’s grace READ v15. Don’t be like the wilderness generation. God’s grace is always available to us in our time of need. But those who do not depend on it will not enter his kingdom. How do you miss out or fall short of God’s grace? In painful times, you harden your heart against God. You decide it is too tough to be a Christian. You decide it is not worth it. You give in to the pressure. You turn from reliance and submission to Jesus.
* Don’t allow a bitter root READ v16. This is a picture of a root that produces bitter or poisonous results. Just one church member spreading this causes defilement of many. We see the poster: ‘if you see anything suspicious, tell the police’ not ‘oh, there’s something suspicious, I’m sure the police will sort it out.’ It is a job for the whole church family. Not a witch-hunt, haunting each other, predatory, stalking. Not by excluding each other but by strengthening each other.
* Watch out that no-one is like Esau. Esau was the older of two brothers – he was Isaac’s heir. Isaac’s heirloom was God’s great promise for to bring blessing to his people and through them, to all peoples. But one time Esau was hungry and agreed to swap his place as heir for lentil stew his brother was cooking. He swapped his privilege in God’s plan for saving humankind for a meal. It didn’t even have meat in it. He is someone who turns his back on the living Lord. Not interested in God’s salvation. What pleasure is so important to you that you will risk life with God for it? Esau spurned it and became a pattern of arrogant unbelief. He is a warning to those preoccupied by self-gratification and who so easily turn their backs on God and his promises.