

Hebrews 12

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[0 : 00] 19, beginning at verse 65 and reading through to verse 80, Psalm 119. This is God's word.

Do good to your servant according to your word, O Lord. Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands.

Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I obey your word. You are good, and what you do is good.

Teach me your decrees. Though the arrogant have smeared me with lies, I keep your precepts with all my heart.

Their hearts are callous and unfeeling, but I delight in your law. It was good for me to be afflicted, so that I might learn your decrees.

[1 : 04] The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold. Your hands made me and formed me.

Give me understanding to learn your commands. May those who fear you rejoice when they see me, for I have put my hope in your words.

I know, O Lord, that your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me. May your unflinching love be my comfort according to your promise to your servant.

Let your compassion come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight. May the arrogant be put to shame for wronging me without cause, but I will meditate on your precepts.

May those who fear you turn to me, those who understand your statutes. May my heart be blameless towards your decrees, that I may not be put to shame.

[2 : 15] Amen. Hebrews 12 and verse 5 through to verse 8. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons.

My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?

If you are not disciplined, and everyone undergoes discipline, then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Amen.

It's common experience for us as human beings to need a spoken encouragement to keep us going in challenging situations.

[3 : 26] It could be your gym instructor telling you to keep on going, or he'll give you another set of 10 press-ups to do. It might be the mountain guide who assures you the top is not so far away.

It could be the rugby fans filling the home stadium so that the fairly mediocre team is able to upset a much better team because of the encouragement that they're getting.

Think of an athlete receiving their gold medal, or a movie star collecting an Oscar, and they say, I couldn't have done this without my mom and my dad.

They were always there with the right word of encouragement at the right time. Well, the book of Hebrews is all about encouragements.

It's a spiritual pep talk for Christians who are wondering whether it's really worth it, whether perhaps they should return to their Old Testament style of temple worship.

[4 : 33] From the end of chapter 10 onwards, it's had a particular focus on endurance. The Hebrew Christians had suffered many things, we're told in verse 32 of chapter 10, but you have need of endurance.

They've already been through a lot, but there's more to come, and they need to keep going. They're discovering that suffering is a normal part of the Christian life.

The pressure is relentless. They've been isolated from the temple, from its social life, perhaps from its economic perks and benefits.

They feel that they're on their own. They were promised that following Jesus was the way to know God's true blessing. But now perhaps they're wondering if leaving the temple has brought God's judgment upon them.

Surely God blesses the righteous is a question that's probably in the back of their minds. And what the writer to the Hebrews has done here in chapter 11 is to locate these Christians in the community of faith throughout all the ages.

[5 : 50] Every significant hero in the Old Testament and many anonymous men and women of faith have had to face suffering, trusting in God's promises.

In the first few verses of chapter 12, he points them to Jesus Christ. This is the sinless Messiah. The Messiah, the Christ who the Jews were all waiting for.

The pinnacle, the climax of Old Testament religion is this man. And remember how much he suffered. Sinless, yet crucified.

Suffering because he obeyed God. Not because he had done something wrong. Suffering beyond anything we can imagine.

He is an example. Yes, but he's much more than that. He's the fountainhead. He's the source of the faith and the grace which will keep his people enduring, persevering.

[6 : 59] Having exhorted these Christians to look to Jesus and to consider Jesus, the writer now reminds them to listen to the voice of God.

The voice of God speaking directly to them through his word. Verse 5. Have you forgotten this word of exhortation, this word of encouragement that speaks to you as sons?

Well, who's speaking to them as sons? Whose voice is this? Who's exhorting them here? Verse 7. It is God who's treating you as sons. God is speaking to you.

These are verses quoted from Proverbs 3, verse 11 and 12. These ancient scriptures, Old Testament scriptures, are addressing Christians as God's sons.

Yes, they were written by Solomon, but they were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. So we don't just hear Solomon speaking.

[8 : 11] God has so owned these words that we're to hear his voice in them speaking to our hearts. God is addressing you as sons through his word.

I want us to think then about the voice of God addressing Christians in their suffering. There are three areas I hope we can cover.

The first is the voice of God itself. Then what does the voice say to us? And how, thirdly, how should we respond to the voice of God?

The voice of God itself then, speaking in the words. And the first thing to notice is that the voice of God speaks into people's sufferings.

Many people have the experience when they're in pain, when they're lonely, they feel deserted. They believe that God is silent. But this scripture tells us that God continues to speak contrary to our experience.

[9 : 27] God continues to speak in our suffering. God's word is true in an absolute sense. Not just true, absolutely correct, but true as in never fading, never failing.

Always true. What he said, he is still saying. And the ups and downs of our experience do not change the status of scripture.

When we are low, when we are in pain, God speaks in scripture. When we're high and we're rejoicing, God speaks in scripture.

What he says doesn't dissolve like a will-o'-the-wisp, just because things are difficult in your life. It's at those times of suffering and pain that we discover that God's word is most secure, most solid.

We can truly rest on it. It's reliable. What a great privilege that is. Who's speaking to us here?

[10 : 37] In our sufferings as Christians, we can hear the voice of the one who created and sustains all things. The one who has sovereign power to prevent or allow affliction, to step in and provide a way out.

The one who is working all things together for good with omniscient wisdom and absolute power. What a privilege it is to suffer and in our sufferings to hear the words of God which are living and active, life-changing, sanctifying energy.

These are the words of eternal life. Where else should we go in our sufferings but to God? Many people go through life's challenges without ever hearing God speaking words of comfort or encouragement.

And that puts a great responsibility on us. The responsibility to listen, to keep reading our Bibles when we're in pain and when we're suffering.

To listen to His voice regardless of our condition and to take every opportunity that we can of bringing that voice to those who are lost without the word by bringing God's word to them in their need.

[12 : 04] The voice of God speaks to us in our sufferings. The second thing about this voice it is the voice of a heavenly Father. When we suffer we often hear lots of voices.

We hear our own voice bringing out our neuroses, our inferiority complexes or perhaps our superiority complex, our sense of entitlement and pride and self-pity and self-preservation. There's that voice in me that says I don't deserve this. That's my voice. And then there's other people. People like Job's friends who are ready to come in with all their worldly wisdom and quick fixes.

Often the voice of the devil is there too mixed in with it all. Firing his fiery darts of doubt. Accusation, temptation to give up. These voices frequently tell us that our suffering results from our failure. We're suffering because we're guilty. The accusation is there. This is a punishment. But that's not the voice that we hear from God.

[13 : 27] This is a father's voice. You see, for a Christian, Jesus Christ has taken away every penal consequence of sin. There's no context now for us of punishment in a legal, judgmental sense.

When we are suffering, we are not in God's law court to be whipped and beaten and sentenced and condemned and executed.

As Christians, when we suffer, it's as though we're in God's living room. Our father is there correcting us. This is not a legal punishment.

This is the hand of a father's discipline. I'll show you how to do it. You did it wrong. I want you to do it this way. I'm teaching you. I'm correcting you.

I'm helping you to grow. I'm fitting you to come home to heaven. It's a father's voice. And that's one of the most liberating things a Christian can ever realize.

[14 : 35] Our faith is not just about being forgiven. Jesus Christ has accomplished a full forgiveness for sins by his sinless life and his sacrificial death.

In him, we are completely justified. But that doesn't make us islands of righteousness, isolated. We're forgiven in order to be adopted.

Our sins are taken away. The debt that we owe to Adam is paid so that we might be brought into the family of God and made heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

From that point on, we are not to view any part of our experience as falling outside of the relationship of covenant love. Everything we encounter as Christians, we encounter with God as our Father and Jesus Christ as our brother and the Holy Spirit within us testifying that we are born into that family as we cry out, Abba, Father.

Father. There's nothing you go through as a Christian on your own. Everything you face, you face as a child of God's.

[15 : 52] Whatever comes your way, you can face it knowing that the God who feeds the birds and clothes the lilies is your Father. Jesus Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, interceding by his very presence, interceding for you, securing God's grace for you in your sufferings and he's able to save to the uttermost in every situation and he is not ashamed to call you brothers.

I don't want to add a single word to scripture but I think the context of Romans 8 is fitting to say I am sure that neither death nor life, angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the fatherly love of God, from the paternal love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It's a father's voice. Thirdly, this voice has always been sufficient to sustain people in their sufferings.

It's quoted, isn't it, from Proverbs 3. I imagine the saints listed there in Hebrews 11 what kept them going in their suffering, in their different trials, clinging on to God's promises.

What kept them going? Surely it was the word of God speaking to them. Perhaps they read this scripture. Perhaps they knew Proverbs 3. Perhaps they knew some other text that assured them of

God's care.

[17 : 36] Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. The Old Testament saints heard this voice and it was enough to sustain them.

The same voice speaks to us, the same word and with the same message. But can we not say more than that? Surely it was the fatherly voice of God that sustained our Lord Jesus Christ in his sufferings.

Right before Jesus went into the wilderness to suffer the direct temptation of the devil, what happens? The father speaks to him, my son in whom I am well pleased.

It's the father's affirmation that sets Jesus up as the Holy Spirit descends upon him to go and face that temptation in Matthew 16 and 17.

The same voice speaks on the Mount of Transfiguration as Jesus begins to predict his sufferings. Jesus could suffer as an obedient son because he heard the father's voice, my son.

[18 : 56] And then we hear him speaking with the reciprocal voice in Gethsemane and on the cross. Jesus Christ who heard those words, my son, was able to pray in the garden, Father, if this cup can pass, but not my will but yours.

Now the one who heard those words, my son, was able to hang on a cross and say, Father, forgive them. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Surely the voice of God speaking in the word has been enough to sustain the people, the Christians of all generations, the men and women of faith and significantly our Savior himself in his sufferings.

Before we move on to ask what this voice says to us, I want to point out two uncomfortable implications. I was uncertain where to place this in the sermon and I've decided to put it here because I hope it will increase the impact as we listen to what this voice says.

Because there's something going on here which is absolutely counter-cultural for Western society. It's so counter-cultural that you might find it offensive when we spell it out.

[20 : 26] Even as Christians we might find this offensive if we've been unconsciously influenced by our culture. See our culture tells us two things.

It tells us that the purpose of our lives is to maximize human flourishing. In other words to minimize suffering. And it also tells us that the way to do that to maximize our flourishing by tapping into resources that we have hidden away inside ourselves.

ourselves. But these scriptures are telling us the exact opposite. These scriptures are telling us that God has a very different purpose in mind.

His highest aim is not that you would flourish in this world with its brokenness and sinfulness. If you flourish here and that's all you have when life ends your flourishing ends.

God's working on our eternal flourishing. He's preparing us for heaven where we'll be absolutely dependent on him.

[21 : 37] Absolutely in love with him forever in the most flourishing relationship possible. And because that's his goal he has ordained to continue to allow us to suffer for a short while in this world that we might go to heaven where suffering will be wiped away forever.

But the second thing that this scripture tells us which is so contrary to what we hear from the world is that you do not have the resources that you need to flourish buried inside yourself.

God's purposes of eternal flourishing are not going to be achieved by you digging deep and looking within and realizing your potential and being true to yourself and following your heart.

No, this tells us that we can only achieve God's purpose for our lives as he disciplines us, as he corrects us.

We're not basically right on the inside and God knows that. We only flourish as we submit to his hand and to his voice.

[22 : 54] We don't have the resources inside ourselves to make ourselves right. We can't endure the correction process by listening to our heart. Only the voice of God is sufficient.

But I would add this, only the voice of God is also necessary to sustain us in our suffering. if God did not call us but just left us in the eerie silence of sin, what potential would you have?

If God merely left you to realize your own potential as a sinner, we'd all be damned. If he didn't speak his words of correction to us and of discipline, we'd be like spiritual tombs.

We could rest in peace and realize the potential of those who are dead to disintegrate and to decay. Implicit in Hebrews 12 here is a message of absolute sovereign grace.

A person is only brought to heaven as God the Father works his salvation in us from outside. Only as we look out to a suffering saviour, only as we listen to a voice that speaks to us from heaven, only as we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who brings life and grace imparts it to us.

[24 : 23] Thank God that he doesn't leave us to realize our potential as sinners. The world is bad enough. Imagine a world where every sinner was left unrestrained to fulfill their potential for evil.

this voice then, the voice of God that speaks, tells us we can't save ourselves.

And as Christians we need to realize that we cannot fit ourselves for heaven, but we must be in God's crucible.

We need him to work on us, and that is more precious than anything that this world can offer. What then does the voice of God say?

What does the voice of God say to people when they're suffering? suffering? We know there are people here who are suffering, obviously, and there are others who are perhaps suffering in ways that we don't know about.

[25 : 32] Some of you may be suffering because of injustice you've experienced as a direct result of your faith. Because you are a Christian, that opportunity didn't come to you, or you were isolated and excluded.

But some of you are suffering an illness, maybe bereavement, maybe the loss of a child, maybe various kinds of failure and disappointment and depression and other forms of mental illness, the psychological and physical consequences of rape or domestic abuse or injustice or humiliation. I don't know what you're suffering. These things are not the direct result of your faith, but they raise the same troubled question for you as Christians.

Why am I suffering? Where is God? what's he doing to me? Why do sinful people seem to have it so easily? And I'm concerned that this doesn't remain abstract or theoretical.

Scripture takes these questions seriously. Nowhere does God tell us that these things are good.

They'll have no place in the perfections of heaven. Nowhere does God tell you to pull up your socks and start your upper lip.

[26 : 47] big sections of Scripture talk about how to deal with the painful trials and temptations of living in a broken sinful world.

These things are evil. what is good? All of that is evil. The suffering is wrong and is bad but what is good is that God continues to speak in the midst of it all.

So I'm not asking what does God say in a philosophical way or what does God say to Christians in general but what does God say to you in your sufferance and this is what he says verse 5 my son do not make light of the Lord's discipline don't lose heart when he rebukes you.

My son don't get discouraged don't give in to doubt don't give in to dismay don't get downcast distressed don't be overly distressed by this and don't believe the lie that you deserted and whatever you do don't desert me keep going stick with it persevere like the saints endure like your savior it's too soon to quit I know how much you can take and I won't allow this to continue beyond the grace I supply to sustain you what else does the lord say because the lord disciplines those he loves he disciplines my son I never cause my children a needless tear you can't see it yet but there's a purpose in this I'm using this to shape you it's only a temporary means it'll pass away you'll get beyond this this is just passing trouble it's not your end

I'm using it to purify your faith I'm using this to make you more like Jesus I'm using this to develop your spiritual character you ask me to sanctify you this is the way I do it I'm not just preparing you for greater service and usefulness in this world I'm preparing you for service in heaven and in glory I'm only ever going to take from you what you'll have to give up anyway you can't hold on to these things forever you want to come and be with me in heaven you have to let go of this world's possessions one day you'll have to leave your friends and your family behind your honor and your respect and your reputation it'll all be gone even your health and your life you have to let go of those things because one day Christ will come and transform your lowly body to be like his glorious body

[29 : 51] I'm only going to take from you what you have to leave behind anyway this is discipline this is correction this is training I'm teaching you to let go of this world now so that you won't

stumble and fall when you come to cross the waters of death I'm teaching you to loosen your grip on things you can't keep so that you can keep those gain those treasures you'll never lose what else does the voice of God say to us in our suffering because the Lord disciplines those he loves and chastises punishes everyone he accepts as a son my son I love you I love you now I love you in your suffering I don't treat everyone like this many people have rejected my love and rejected my

son but you've received my son as the manifestation of my infinite love to you and now I ask you to receive this suffering as the work of my love in your life

I love you the Lord only disciplines those he loves I'm doing this because you're part of my family I only do this to those who are in my family I don't take delight in or pleasure in afflicting you my heart is not in it but I do delight in what you will become through this be assured then that I love you and that my love for you determines my methods and my goals even if you can't understand that now what else does God's voice say to us it is for discipline that you have to endure God is treating you as sons for what son is there whom his father does not discipline if you're left without discipline in which all have participated then you are illegitimate children and not sons my son this is a mark of the reality of your faith don't listen to the devil don't listen to Job's friends don't listen to the accusations you're not suffering because you're a religious fraud you're not suffering because your holiness is superficial and fake you're suffering because I can see your heart and your faith is authentic there's something here

I can strengthen and purify and I will do that through suffering so stick with it go through the whole lesson the more you endure the more you will gain from this discipline and what you will gain you'll never lose you are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed but of those who have faith and preserve their souls God speaks here as well to those who are not in his family if you're not disciplined then you're illegitimate children and not true sons there's a warning here don't be satisfied with merely the outward appearance of a Christian hanging out in church visiting God's family without becoming a part of God's family you can go through all kinds of religious motions Christian activities but you can do it without ever hearing the voice of God speak to you as his son there's a warning here if you're not a Christian then the aroma of sin and death is still all over your suffering I don't mean to sound harsh I don't mean that you're suffering as a direct kind of a guilt punishment but there's a warning here if you're not hearing God speak to you as father in your sufferings one day you'll hear him speak to you as judge we would be cruel people if we showed you care in your immediate suffering didn't warn you of the danger for those who die outside of God's love in Jesus Christ in your sufferings hear the voice of God as a warning but in that warning hear a veiled invitation of his grace those who receive God's warnings really have to wait long before they hear his voice of mercy here's your suffering let it drive you to Christ let it drive you back to

God's why are you suffering on your own in isolation when there is a God of love who would speak to you in his word if you would just turn from your sin and trust him finally and I've gone over time how should suffering Christians respond to the voice of God he tells us that he's disciplined us he's got a purpose it's out of love is out of his care how do we respond to that as Christians three things receive by faith what that voice imparts it does not promise you immediate release from your suffering but it does tell you that there's purpose and privilege that there's hope and there's assurance to be had whilst you suffer resign yourself to God's contrary providence

[35 : 50] I recognize that this is a father who's infinitely more wise than you are and he knows what he's doing and rest in that fact the way as you did as a child when you didn't know what mum and dad were on about but you knew they were mum and dad and they loved you and so you went along resign yourself the hymn writer said the bud may have a bitter taste but sweet will be the flower there's something to thank God for in the hardest trials and even if you can't see what it is you can thank him for the loving purpose which is assured in his word receive by faith then what his voice imparts secondly answer the voice which calls you sons follow Jesus example when

God the father spoke to our Lord and said my son he answered back father to follow his example in this is to bring us into fellowship with every person in the blessed trinity because we look at the son and we see him crying father forgive them and that's for us and then we listen to the word and we heard hear the voice of God saying my son don't grow weary he's speaking to us and then the spirit adds his internal testimony in our hearts assures us that this this encouragement my son is spoken in us and as sons we answer that voice and cry out Abba father and we find ourselves in the midst of our sufferings communing with God himself our father son and holy spirit thirdly finally close here obey the voice obey the voice

I don't know what you're suffering I don't know what temptation you face I don't know what doubt or bitterness of mind you're struggling with as we speak but take up that position of fellowship with God a trust in the provision of grace that he promises and obey we persevere we Christians persevere we Christians endure we're not the people who give up you're not the person who gives

up we don't give in we don't turn back we don't tune out we don't turn off we don't grow weary we don't pull back we don't slack off we have Jesus as our saviour God the father as our heavenly father the promised holy spirit within us and a glorious future ahead we are not the ones who draw back but those who press on in faith and obediently serve our God in faith amen 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 amen