

Heavenly holy home

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[0 : 00] Hebrews 12, verse 3. 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 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. 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.

[1 : 35] Strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it may become defiled.

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.

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg, that no further message be spoken to them.

For they could not endure the order that was given. If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned. Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, I tremble with fear.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enthralled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

[3 : 02] See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens. This phrase, yet once more, indicates the removal of things that are shaken, that is, things that have been made, in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship and reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

Good morning everyone. Will you pray with me as we come to God's word?

Our Father, we thank you that you give us your word and we need it to live on. Lord, I pray that you would remove all distraction, I pray that you would give us understanding with our minds, and I ask that this understanding would press into our hearts, so that we might further be encouraged to press on, running the race, looking to Jesus.

[4 : 36] Give me every grace in speaking, give all of us ears to hear you speaking. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Well, I was listening to a radio station one time, and the hosts got serious for a moment, which is really unusual.

Usually it's just banter, but they got serious, and they were asking each other, did they believe that bad things had purpose? And one of them, one of the hosts said that they thought that everything

was connected, and they thought that this thought experiment helps sometimes, that maybe, yes, your toast got burnt in the morning, and your kids spilt their breakfast, and your car was out of petrol, and it ran you late for work, and it was really stressful, but maybe all those bad things stop you from being in that car accident, if you had have left 15 minutes earlier.

Or maybe you bump into someone, and you land a big client, a big deal for work, maybe something good happens because of those.

Do you get that secular cause and effect universe with a bit of wishful thinking thrown in?

You can imagine maybe, maybe within my lifespan, there can be silver linings to pain. A better version I've heard is that pain can grow your character, it can actually help us be thankful for what we do have.

[6 : 10] I think that's a better version. So that's one way of coping with hard things. Here's another way.

We're hearing the awful things happening in Myanmar, the civil war and the earthquake. A friend of mine who's over there, you may know them as well, but I won't mention their name, but they sent a picture of this Buddhist temple, and this hall is filled with all these Buddhists meditating, and they're blindfolded, not talking to each other, sitting still, got a bottle of water all day, every day, except for bodily necessities.

That's how you deal with pain. This life is an illusion. It's meaningless. Karma is to be escaped. Suppress, eradicate all your desires. That's how you can get through life. Escape life, even. There's another approach to pain.

The other way is what we heard through Lincoln and Leah, isn't it? That incredible report of the school teacher who... I knew I wasn't going to get through this.

[7 : 37] The school teacher who, in that instinctive moment, when the building was trembling, grabbed those three kids to herself, and when the rescuers came, said, prioritise them, and it cost her her life.

And Lincoln and Leah knew the father and heard his testimony, and his view of God being good was not shaken.

They said it was emotional testimony. There was deep grief, and yet he could say that his daughter embodied Jesus in giving her life to save others.

There was peace and purpose, even hope in that testimony. No one has such deep wells to drink from to face hardship and suffering than a Christian.

We are given such deep wells of resources to drink from. We can...

[8 : 51] The things I've described so far are just things that happen to us. But these Christians back then, they were facing hostility from their own people. Why doesn't the book end in chapter 10?

We've been in Hebrews for a while now, and I want to do a bit of recap. My small group is getting a bit sick of me doing a recap every week.

But I want some responses, okay? So what have we learnt so far? What is Jesus better than? Like, we've seen lots of themes. What is he better than?

Just try and keep it like one-word answers. Angels. He's better than angels. The greatest beings, closest beings to God. He's better and greater.

Everything, yeah? That's a summary. Yes? Moses. He's greater than Moses. Moses was faithful as a servant.

[9 : 52] Jesus was faithful as a son over the whole house. Yep. Melchizedek. Melchizedek. Oh, yeah, thanks. I forgot about that. Melchizedek.

This strange figure, this king and priest. Jesus is greater than Melchizedek, the king and priest. He's greater than David.

Yes. The greatest king. He's greater than Abraham. Yeah? He's the greatest sacrifice.

All those animals sacrificing, they could just wash the body. They couldn't deal with your conscience. He's the once for all sacrifice. Yeah? High priest.

We need someone to connect us to God. You need a go-between. You need one. I'm not it. You have, we have the great high priest, the God-man, Jesus Christ, who connects us to God, the greatest priest.

[10 : 55] Prophet. Yes, God spoke in the past all these words from God about who God is and his will, and now his son reveals God fully and his will for the world.

It's a full and final word from God. Tabernacle. Yes. The high priest couldn't go in only once a year and only with blood.

We can go into the presence of God through the curtain, through Jesus. We're in the holy of holies. We're in the presence of God.

He is our tabernacle. There's also the rest. Joshua didn't give them rest in the land. We have rest in Christ.

Anything else people want to say? That's pretty good. I'm sure there's more. Like Job. Job. Yep. We've got the whole list of Old Testament saints.

[11 : 57] Jesus is at the forefront of that. Now, so why doesn't the book end at chapter 10? The argument's done, in a sense. Jesus is better.

Don't go back to Judaism. Like, don't revert back. He's so much better. He's better than everything. We have full access to God.

Hold on to your hope. Don't neglect meeting together. Encourage each other. The day of judgment and salvation is coming. Why not end there? Why, as Matt Hunt took us through, does he say, recall your previous sufferings?

When some of you went to prison. Others visited, risking your life visiting them in prison. Others had your houses taken from you and you were joyful about it.

Remember that. Why is he... Remember your original confidence. And then, as Martin took us through, this Old Testament from creation right through history, this parade of saints who trusted the promises of God.

[13 : 07] And at the front of this parade is Jesus. The one who is the answer to their faith, who creates our faith. He's the example of faith.

He endured out of joy. The joy set before him. So what's all this about? I think the key through this whole section is that word endurance.

In a sense, he's spoken to the mind and now he's speaking to the heart, convincing us. We need to endure.

We're part of this great, long list of saints following Jesus who face hardship and trusted the promises of God.

To believe Jesus is so much better than what this world has to offer, it comes at a cost. The cost is we don't belong in this world.

[14 : 13] I think we can talk about this as if that's just some Christians' experience. As if some people face persecution. I think this is all Christians.

This is all of us. Now, it can be simple things. It can be you've got church on a Sunday and your sports team, it's been the rain, it's rescheduled for a Sunday and you're just like, I can't, I've got to go to church.

And you'll probably get ridiculed for that. You'll probably feel like you're letting the team down.

There's simple things like that. But I know there's people in this church family who have been asked by their superiors at work to be dishonest.

Legally, you're doing the wrong thing and yet pretty confident they'll get away with it. That puts you in a dilemma. You can not be a team player and feel like you don't belong to that company all because you want to be faithful to your Lord.

I know some of you have had close friends who haven't talked to you for years simply because you're a Christian. There is a cost. There's some friends who say, don't talk about Christian things around me.

[15 : 34] Not realising that those things are at the heart of who you are. They're rejecting the core of you. That's a cost. I know there's relational strains in families.

I've heard some of the things at least. I'm not sure there's a family in this room that doesn't have relational strains because of your allegiance to Jesus.

At least a bit weird in your family. This section addresses our fearful hearts.

That not having a home in this world is worth it because of the home that Jesus Christ gives us is far better.

In chapter 12, we've got this great cloud of witnesses. We're part of this great history of people trusting God. And chapter 12 gives us these deep resources to drink from.

[16 : 40] Here's what I think we see. We aren't alone. We're following the Son. Hostility and hardships are even evidence of our Father's love.

There's good purpose. It's not meaningless. He's creating us to be holy and loving peace. A people who are holy and loving peace.

We are already members of his holy, heavenly home. And we're going to receive a new home that can't be shaken.

We've got so many resources to drink from. Let's have a look at each of these. So if you've got your Bibles with you, verses 3 to 4. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted.

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. It's an interesting thing to focus on, isn't it?

[17 : 54] Follow Jesus. Wouldn't it be better to think of his reward now? He doesn't say that. He says, think of his suffering.

Why is that encouraging? Well, the hostile sinners that he endured under were his own people. They were the Jewish people who rejected him. So these Jewish Christians, facing the same hostility from their own people, their own families, the son can sympathize with your family cutting you off.

You're in good company. It's not strange what's happening to you. Very painful, but it's not strange. You're following the son. In your struggle against sin, I don't think that's just sin generally.

In the context of Hebrews, it's more likely that it's the temptation to turn away from Jesus. The greatest threat isn't the hostility from people.

[19 : 06] But in that circumstance, the greatest threat is the temptation to just play it safe and lose your love for Jesus. You haven't yet shed your blood.

Well, thank you. Thanks for reminding me of what could happen. How is that encouraging? It can't be saying that you need to be faithful to Jesus unless your life is at stake.

The Old Testament lists the saints, Jesus himself. Faithfulness to Jesus is our whole life. I think it could be meaning something along these lines.

Emma's created this list of bad things for Sam and we've numbered them one to ten. Just to help him when something bad happens, goes, is it kind of like this or this or this?

It's to put it in perspective. So I wonder if it's saying, yes, it feels incredibly overwhelming what you're going through. But maybe it's just putting it in perspective.

[20 : 21] I think it might be more than that. I wonder if it's saying, you haven't yet shed your blood, but consider him. He did.

And he did it for you. He endured trusting his father to the point of shedding his blood for you.

I wonder if that's why it's encouraging. So consider him. You're not alone. He knows the pain, the searing pain of being rejected by your family, your own people.

And most of all, remember that he shed his blood to have you. Then we've got verses 5 to 11. I think these give us a perspective that can even transform the most malicious criticism and slander. Being deliberately left out. It can transform even the worst kinds of abuse. Verse 7 captures this section.

[21 : 36] It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. Our culture says pain is to be avoided.

It's inherently bad. But the believer, we can drink from this well in our suffering. Tim Chester, an author, says this. Hardship is not a sign that God dislikes or disowns us.

Quite the opposite. It's a sign that he loves us and accepts us as his children. If we receive hardship by faith, it has the power to bring us closer to our heavenly father.

In every adversity, we can enjoy the father's love. Now that only makes sense if we believe that Jesus has shared his sonship with us.

I'm sure if I handed the mic around, we could all share stories of how your suffering has brought you closer to God. Especially the older saints among us.

[22 : 51] Teaching us that his love is sufficient. We still call bad things bad.

Evil things are still evil. Injustice is injustice. But the Christian can look past all those evil, intensive people and see a loving father.

Who is treating you as his child. Who he loves. That's incredible. There's no other faith in the world that can look past suffering like that.

And see purpose in it. I was going to list examples of this, but I don't think it's appropriate. There's things that my dad and my parents disciplined me.

And I'm so grateful for them now. I did not like them at the time. But I'm so grateful. I'm sure you can all think of things.

[23 : 59] How much more? In their limited wisdom, limited opportunity in training us. How much more should we trust a wise and in control father?

Who wants to give us eternal life? That perspective, it gives us resolve.

But I think it does more than that. Or as Tim Chester said, it can actually make us go, you're loving me. It can actually connect us to God as father.

And it can even give us wisdom and ask different questions. We stop asking, why is this happening to me? And we start asking, Father, what do you want me to learn in this?

Who are you that I can rest and find hope in you? How do I respond in a way that pleases you? It can teach us to ask wiser questions.

[25 : 05] To be trained by it. So we are following the son. We can drink from the well knowing our father loves us.

And we're told, we're not left in the dark about what our father is doing. It's not some vague sense. He tells us at the end of verse 10 and 11. End of verse 10.

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. I don't know if you're familiar. Have you heard the phrase in Christian circles?

It's something along these lines. There's different forms of it. Seek holiness, not happiness. Have you heard that phrase? Okay, great. I'm getting one or two nods.

[26 : 13] Now there's something to that. If what we mean by that is don't just seek the immediate pleasures of what we want now. Think of holiness.

There's something to that statement. Otherwise I think it's dangerous. There's a dangerous misunderstanding it could lead you to. As if holiness and happiness are mutually opposed.

That is not true. Our father is committed to giving us everlasting happiness. And for that to occur, we need holiness. You want to be happy?

You want others in this church to be happy? We need to share his holiness. Because when we act righteously, it creates peace in community.

Peace with God. Peace with one another. It creates joy. And so God wants us to pursue what his goal is.

[27 : 24] That holiness, that righteousness that produces a peace-loving community. That's what our goal should be. And I think that's what verses 12 to 17 are about.

We know our father's purpose. It is a good purpose. He's playing the long game, so to speak. And so we should get on board with his goal.

Hardships are not reason to doubt and turn away from God's goodness or think Jesus isn't so good after all. It's time to get on board with God's goal.

It's time to run towards the same goal. The body metaphor. Lift your drooping hands. Strengthen weak knees.

Make straight paths for your feet. I think this section makes the most sense in a church application, not just an individual. We're to help each other drink from these resources during hardship.

[28 : 33] See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God. We all wander off sometimes. We all lose our way.

We're to give each other this teaching so that we can keep going. That root of bitterness is quoting Moses.

It's an internal attitude that says, I can turn away from God and everything will be okay. No, it won't be okay.

Don't let that attitude spread among you. God is committed to our holiness to create our happiness. That sexual immorality can spread.

Now, I'm not sure why that specifically appears here. The author comes back to it in chapter 13. Certainly it would destroy peace. Certainly it's not holy.

[29 : 34] But maybe it was a particular problem then. In that church. And then we've got Esau. He is the opposite of the great cloud of witnesses in chapter 11.

He is godless and unholy. He was in line to receive the promises of God. And he thought they were of such low value, he'd prefer a bowl of stew.

That's how ungodly Esau was. He'd prefer this world instead of the promises of God. See to it we don't have that attitude. So let's get on board with God's goal of creating a peace-loving, righteous community. And we've got to help each other do that. Help each other drink from these worlds. Yes, it's hard following Jesus. It's costly. But you're following the Son. The Father is loving you. [30 : 47] And here's the next well to drink from. 18 to 24. In the Son. Yes, you might be cut off here.

But you are already members of the heavenly joy-filled family of God. This is not future. This is now. There's two pictures here. There's Mount Sinai. The giving of the law. Which I think this is a way to recap the whole book of Hebrews.

There's nothing to go back to there. And then there's the heavenly city. The heavenly community. In Mount Zion. There's two mountains.

You have not come to Mount Sinai. You have come to this heavenly city. Don't approach God through the law. Approach God through faith in Jesus.

[31 : 47] You think it was impressive when God came down and the mountains shook and his holiness was like a fire that made the mountains smoke and the trumpet blast and his voice in thunder.

Yes, it was awesome. But they were terrified. Don't talk to us anymore, God. I can't handle it. Even Moses is petrified.

They couldn't stand in the presence of God. They couldn't enjoy his company. Don't approach God like that.

Don't go back to that. It crushed them. There's no access to God. Verse 22.

But you have come. To his holy, heavenly home. By faith in Jesus. You have come to Mount Zion. And to the city of the living God.

[32 : 59] The heavenly Jerusalem. And to innumerable angels. In festal gathering. And to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.

And to God. And to God. The judge of all. And to the spirits of the righteous made perfect. And to Jesus. The mediator of a new covenant. And to the sprinkled blood.

That speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. We use the term church. We use the term church. And what do you think of when I say church?

You probably think of what we're doing now. Which, fair enough. This is church. We are the church. The people of the church. Building's not the church. The people of the church. We might talk universal church.

There's so many Christians gathered around Newcastle. We are united to those who trust the Jesus of the Bible. There's a universal church. But here's the foundation. Here's the most true.

[33 : 58] The most real. I'm not sure. I'm probably creating dichotomies here. There is the heavenly church. We are in heaven right now. If you're in faith in Jesus.

We are in heaven. We are gathered with all the Old Testament saints. Who put their faith in God's promises. That were fulfilled in Jesus. And we're gathered with all Christians.

Who have faith in Jesus. We're in the heavenly church. Knowing that is good news. If you feel like you're losing your home in this life.

Is it not? Whenever you get into the immediate presence of God. God in scripture. You find angels. What are they doing?

They are not trembling. Like Mount Zion. They're in festal gathering. I don't know what that looks like.

[35 : 00] But they are singing. They are making a raucous. They are partying. This is a joy-filled community.

They are in the immediate presence of God. And angels are with us. Full of joy. And your name is enrolled in heaven.

You might be scratched out of the sporting team. You might be kicked out of your job. You might. Some people are even kicked out of their family.

You lose your last name. But your name is written in heaven. You are gathered with all those Old Testament saints who are made perfect now.

But you noticed it, didn't you? In the middle of these wonderful descriptions, you've got this terrifying description.

[36 : 12] God, the judge of all. Did that make you tremble a bit? How is that good news? Or verse 24.

We're the new covenant people. We've come to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant. And to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

We've already drawn near to God the judge. We are in the Holy of Holies, behind the curtain, through the blood of Jesus. We've come to the judge and we're safe.

We're accepted. We're washed. We have full access. We can call him Father. Abel's blood, when Cain killed him, cried out to God the judge for vengeance.

Jesus' blood cries out to God's justice for our forgiveness. Forgive them. It's a better word.

[37 : 26] His justice is not against us anymore. It's for us. It's for us. It is good news.

I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more. We are already full members of this heavenly, holy church.

And so you can face suffering, even partying with the angels.

Because you know you belong. And the best is yet to come. Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.

Yes, it hurts if you don't belong to this world. But it would be crazy to build your life on this world that is going to be shaken.

[38 : 36] To refuse to listen to the message of the sun and build your life on what this world is for. That is crazy.

It's going to be shaken. His holiness is coming to purify us so that he creates that community who love righteousness and peace.

Anything that isn't holy will be shaken and gone. And he's giving you, because of Jesus, a home that cannot be shaken.

The best is yet to come. By faith we're in this heavenly gathering. Now let's face it. We struggle to sing that last song. But gee, the best is yet to come.

Have you ever been in a stadium singing? We are going to be gathered with the angels. And our delight is for God and for one another is going to be pure.

[39 : 40] We've got a home that's coming. Don't build it here. You don't belong here and that's okay. You've got a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Christians, drink from these worlds. And we can face hardship and even hostility with peace and purpose and hope and even joy.

We're following the sun. The Father is loving us, getting us ready for this unshakable home. We're already in the greatest community.

So therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. And let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe.

For our God is a consuming fire. I can even, in the sun, I can even look forward to that consuming fire.

[40 : 57] I'm sick of my sin. It's going to be gone. It will be gone. I'm safe in his son. I'm already accepted. That kingdom's coming.

Let's help each other drink from these resources so that we can just stay on track for Jesus. Let us pray. Father, please fill us with this vision of your holy and heavenly home that you've given to us in your son.

Fill us with this vision so that we will remain faithful to you and love holiness. So that we can be happy with you forever.

Lord, place on us a burden of responsibility for one another. To keep us looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

In Jesus' name I ask. Amen. Amen.