

Lent 5

THE SCRIPTURE READINGS

The Epistle Lesson

Hebrews 12:4-13

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(Suffering disciplines for life as God's child.) Hebrews 12:4-13

4 In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 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, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." 7 **Endure hardship as discipline;** God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; **but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.**

11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. 12 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. 13 "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

The Passion Reading

Matthew 27:31-44

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Mid Week Lent 5 – April 6

31 After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. 32 As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. 33 They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). 34 There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. 35 When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 36 And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. 37 Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

38 Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" 41 In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 42 "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" 44 In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

THE MEDITATION "The Blessing of Discipline through Suffering" Hebrews 12:4-13

(Damon sitting at the table, drinking coffee, reading a magazine. Malinda walks in.)

MALINDA: Hi Damon, how are you doing?

DAMON: I don't know. It's been a while since I have been here.

MALINDA: I was telling that to Hamilton and Fawn, that I haven't seen you for a while.

DAMON: You know, my dad had a stroke. He's been living with me now.

MALINDA: So, that's why you haven't been out as much?

DAMON: Well, Dad stays home alone a lot when I work. He needs someone to spend time with *Him*, he can't get out. So, that's what I do at night.

MALINDA: Ah.

DAMON: And, Dad needs a visiting nurse and an aide to help him while I'm gone. Some of that is covered by his insurance. But, there are some significant extra expenses to my budget. I don't have quite the spending money I used to have.

MALINDA: That's quite a burden.

DAMON; Yeah, but I know it's the right thing to do. Dad and Mom took care of me when I was a child, didn't they?

MALINDA: Yes, but when you were children you were always getting older and better able to take care of yourself. Is your dad getting stronger?

DAMON: Maybe not. The nurse has been talking to the physical therapist. They think there are some limits to how much better Dad can get. But, part of the problem is he almost seems to be giving up. They wonder if he is depressed. The only thing he seems to find any joy in is when he and I play cards, or chess, and we talk about the old days.

MALINDA: That's quite a burden.

DAMON: Well, I love my dad. I don't have any plans to stop taking care of him. But, I wonder how long I can do this before I wear out.

MALINDA: Sometimes the hardships of life can seem overwhelming.

DAMON: I know *I'm* feeling overwhelmed. Imagine how my *dad* is feeling. He used to be so active!

Have you ever felt like Damon? Have the challenges and hardships of life ever seemed

overwhelming? A person can have plans for life that are changed out of our control. Our plans might even be how we planned to live for God, to serve Him and our families. But what happens when accidents change our lives. What if the aggression of others in the world cause oil prices to rise and finances to decrease? What if an unexpected illness changes all our plans, our finances, our ability to use our time as we hoped.

Did you ever think that God can use our hardships for our own good? Today's lesson tells us in Hebrews 12:7, **Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons.** While God does not necessarily cause the hardship or the illness, or the economic struggles, He can use them for his people. Do you remember the story of the parable of the sower or farmer. One of the places the seed fell was among the thorns. Jesus says the thorns are the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth. Do worries or your possessions ever get in the way of trusting God, or ever get in the way of serving Him, or loving others? Have you ever realized you needed to get your priorities more in order? Have you ever taken the love of God for granted? Our lesson tells us God can use our hardships, our struggles, for our good and our discipline.

Damon is not only learning what really is and is not important. Damon is also learning that love takes giving or sacrifice. But, guess who gave the most to love? The Almighty God, our Father gave up His *only Son*, His only Son. Guess who endured hardship the most to love us? Jesus took on the sins of the whole world, he took their guilt, their pain, and suffered and died for us. Do you see how our own hardships can help us appreciate the greater sacrifice and the greater suffering and hardships that show us the depths of God's love?

That's what God means when he says, in Hebrews 12:10, **but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.** As our hardships lead us to appreciate more the sacrificial love of God, we grow in faith in God who did that for us. We grow in love for God who gave His only Son. We also grow in our desire to serve the one who loved us this way, by loving others. So, **God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.**

The writer to the Hebrews tells us what we might have already known, but maybe did not want to admit. **11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.**

As you seek to serve God and love others, what hardship faces you? Can you imagine that the God who used the death and rising of His own Son to love and save us, might be able to use your hardship to help you appreciate His love? To help you grow in discipline and the ability to serve Him and love others?

Let's see what Damon learned.

(Malinda sitting at the table, drinking coffee. Damon walks in.)

DAMON: Oh, Hi Malinda.

MALINDA: Hi Damon, are things going any better?

DAMON: Yup, I'm doing much better.

MALINDA: Really?!

DAMON: Well, I was with my dad and the pastor came by to bring communion.

MALINDA: Oh.

DAMON: He had a little devotion before he gave us communion. He read from Hebrews 12 where God says, **“Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons.”**

MALINDA: Hmm. You think that applied to you?

DAMON: Well, both dad and I have undergone hardships. And, in all honesty maybe each we've had our own little pity party, if you know what I mean. We were feeling sorry for ourselves, rather than seeing dad's stroke as an opportunity for love and faith.

MALINDA: That's a pretty positive way to look at a long term illness.

DAMON: Maybe, but you and I both know that life is full of troubles. You go to church with me. We are all sinners, and because of that our world is full of pain and suffering. But, if Jesus used His suffering to love me, can't I use my dad's illness to love Him and to serve God?

MALINDA: Sure. I'm sure that's what God wants us to do, it's just so difficult.

DAMON: I read that verse again, and it also said, **11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.** I want to use dad's illness to be trained in faith in God, and love for my dad. In fact, after the pastor was there and we talked about this verse, and thought about what Jesus had done for us, I think both my dad and I were more at peace with facing whatever hardships lie in the future. God's love is bigger than our problems.

MALINDA: Wow, Damon! With God's help you and your dad have taken his illness and turned it into a blessing!