

Embracing God's Discipline, Part 1 (Hebrews 12:4–5)

Well, discipline—that is a word that probably conjures up in a lot of your minds a lot of negative images. Perhaps there is in your mind some negative memories that are associated with the idea of discipline. You had parents who didn't do it properly or didn't do it lovingly. It is certainly a concept that is abused in our fallen world and a concept that is misunderstood in our fallen world. And, sadly, it is misunderstood even within the church.

When we hear the word *discipline*, we typically think of pain and discomfort, right? How many of you think of pain and discomfort when you think about discipline? Think about something that is sometimes horribly painful? Or you may be thinking of an abuse of authority, somebody who used “discipline” in order to justify their abuse of authority. Perhaps you think of punishment for wrongdoing. Oftentimes that's what people associate discipline with. If I do something wrong, then I have to endure the discipline. This is a punishment for something that I did wrong.

Or maybe in your mind you conjure up the ideas of anger and hatred and violent wrath that is unleashed against you whenever the matter of discipline comes up, because that is what you have experienced in some sense or at some time during your life.

There certainly is an element in discipline that is admittedly difficult for us to endure. The author is honest about that. In Hebrews chapter 12, look at verse 11. “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” The author admits discipline is not an easy thing, and in the moment, discipline—whatever he's describing here in this passage—in the moment, discipline is not a joyful thing. It can often be very sorrowful.

Not all things that we associate with discipline are painful or necessarily sorrowful. For instance, sometimes discipline, as we use this term, is not painful at all, really. It's just uncomfortable. So for instance, not eating every sweet thing that was put before you over the holidays, that takes discipline; that is not painful. If you think that that is painful, you need a reality check. That is not painful. Shoving ice picks underneath your fingernails is painful. Passing by the cookie plate a couple of times in the holiday season is not painful. It might be uncomfortable, it might be difficult, it might take some mental and emotional and spiritual focus, but it's not at all painful. Or not filling your plate to

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overflowing every single time you dish up, even for seconds, that is not necessarily painful. It might be uncomfortable for you, it might be difficult, but it's not painful. Going to the gym and exercising is not painful. You say, Jim, you don't know what would happen to me if I exercise. No, it's not painful. It might be uncomfortable, it might make you sore, but it's not painful; it makes you uncomfortable. Turning off the TV so that you can spend more time reading is not painful, it's just uncomfortable. Getting up an extra thirty minutes early on a workday so that you can read Scripture is not painful; it is uncomfortable. These things are not painful, and they just involve saying no to some things so that we can say yes to other things. Those things make us uncomfortable, but they do not cause us pain. And we need to think clearly in terms of the difference between pain and discomfort. We need to think clearly, in fact, in terms of saying no to some things so that we can say yes to other things. And in many instances, that is the heart and soul of discipline.

Some discipline is educational. For instance, if you want to acquire a new skill—say, the ability to play a musical instrument, or some new bit of knowledge or some new craft or some new art—it's going to take some discipline. It's going to take some practice and some sacrifice and some repetition and muscle memory. And all of that goes into disciplining yourself so that you can pick up a new skill. The point of that discipline is instruction. It's training in some way.

In all of these cases, these things are not joyful in the moment. Even in the case of enduring discipline for the sake of acquiring a new skill, in the moment, during the practice, it involves sometimes sweat, it involves sometimes a focus, it involves a sacrifice of time. It's not necessarily enjoyable in the moment. But the reason we discipline ourselves for certain things is so that we may enjoy the fruit of it, right? You go to the gym and exercise so that you can enjoy the fruit of that exercise. You pass by the cookie plate so that you can enjoy the fruit of passing by the cookie plate, which is sometimes not as delicious as enjoying the cookie plate, but there is a fruit or a thing to be gained at the end of that. That's why you discipline yourself.

Now my objective—and I'm going to be honest with you here right at the beginning of this, what we might call a miniseries of sermons on the subject of discipline—my objective is to disabuse you of all of the false and wrong notions of discipline that you might have lodged in your mind. There are a lot of them, and I'm not going to give them to you right now. But by the time we get to the end of verse 11 and actually into verses 12 and 13 that deal with the [church] body's response to the discipline of God in the

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lives of God's people, by the time we get through the end of 11, 12, and 13, I am hoping that you will see the need and have a love for embracing God's discipline. Did you expect anybody to ever say that in your life? To embrace God's discipline? Because it is something that we ought to embrace, and it is something that we ought to love, and it is something that should be of great encouragement to us. Not because we enjoy the discipline itself. As verse 11 says, no discipline in the moment is joyful—we don't enjoy it in the moment—but those who have been trained by it enjoy the peaceful fruit of righteousness. So that's why we embrace God's discipline, not because we're masochists who love pain and discomfort, but because we enjoy and love and long for and delight in the fruit that God brings into our lives through that discipline.

So I'm going to challenge your understanding of discipline over the next few weeks. I want to dispel any unbiblical and worldly notions of discipline that have crept into your thinking, remove some of the misunderstandings of it, and bring some clarity to what it is and what it isn't and the ways in which God disciplines us so that we can see the hand of God in our lives as He brings discipline into our lives and then we can gladly embrace that and be encouraged by it. We're encouraged by it because then we know this is evidence that I am a son and this is evidence that He loves me. And if He has brought this into my life, then He will do something profitable and fruitful and glorious through it. And so therefore, I can embrace it and I can be thankful for it.

So here's our outline. We're in chapter 12, verse 4. Here's our outline, for those of you who like sermon outlines. I know there are some of you who do. You know who you are. More importantly, I know who you are. And so I'm going to give you a sermon outline here for chapter 12, verse 4 all the way through the end of verse 11. There are four things in these verses that you and I must understand about God's discipline.

First, in verses 4 and 5, we have to have the *proper perspective* on God's discipline. Verse 4: “You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him’” (Heb. 12:4–5).

Second, we have to understand the *proof* of discipline, or know the proof of discipline, that it proves that we are His children and that He is our Father. Verse 6: “For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there

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whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons” (Heb. 12:6–8). That's the second thing.

Third, we have to understand the *purpose* of discipline in verse 9: “Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness” (Heb. 12:9–10). That's the purpose of it.

And fourth, the *product* of discipline in verse 11: “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

The proper perspective on discipline, the proof of discipline, the purpose of discipline, and then the product of discipline—what discipline produces.

Now, I have an advantage that guest speakers do not have, and that is that I don't have any obligation at all to fit all of that into one sermon. And I don't feel any obligation at all to fit all of that into one sermon. And I'll be honest with you, I'm not even going to try to fit all of that into one sermon, and my lack of trying is going to become evident to you very quickly in this sermon. I don't know how many weeks it is going to take to get through all of this passage, but we will get through all of it, and I will be referring back to that outline from time to time as we do. We're not going to rush this because I think that there's a number of things in this passage that will equip us for life and for godliness, and I'm confident that God is going to do things in our hearts through this passage as we understand the purpose and His intentions in discipline.

Now, I want you to see some of the contextual connections that are here. It is tempting for us to think that when we get to verse 4 we are switching subject matters. Verses 1–3 was what? It was the race analogy, right? Run with endurance the race that is set before us, the purpose of the race, how we're to persevere through it, the example that we have—Jesus—who did it by faith. Verse 3, we are to consider Him who endured such hostility against Himself at the hands of sinners so that we will not lose heart and we will not faint. And then we get to verse 4 and it says you've not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin and you've forgotten the encouragement that is addressed to you as sons to not despise the discipline of the Lord. We get to

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verse 4 and think, OK, so the author now, he gets to the end of verse 3, and now he's just switching, he's changing gears, he's turning a corner. Now he's going to start talking about discipline. That is not true. Discipline is essential for an athletic contest, is it not? You must be trained in the race. You must be trained how to run the race. You must be trained and disciplined yourself so that you might be competitive in the race. So the author switching to the subject of discipline is really not a switching. He's simply now addressing another aspect of running the race, which is the discipline that we endure from the Father, which equips us for the running of the race.

There is a different analogy that is pictured in verses 4–11, that of a father and a son. It's the family analogy. But in verses 1–3 it's the race analogy. It's still really a race that we're talking about as we talk about the discipline that equips us and trains us for the race. But now he brings in the father-son analogy—in the family, the father disciplines his son—simply to show that the discipline is necessary and simply to show that the discipline is an evidence of God's love for us and simply to show that the discipline is an evidence of our sonship with Him. So it's not a different analogy. It's kind of an analogy layered on top of another analogy, which is really still the race metaphor that he began in verses 1–3.

There are some important themes that are consistent through the entire passage, and I want to highlight four of them for you. The first one is considering Jesus. There is a comparison in verse 4: “You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.” Who might he have mentioned right in the immediate context who in His striving against sin shed blood? It's Jesus, in verse 3. He's just simply continuing the comparison that he began in verse 3 as he moves into verse 4 and begins to apply it to us, showing us that there is something that we are to consider in our consideration of Jesus, who endured that hostility. We are to consider and remember that we have not yet shed our blood in our striving against sin. Jesus in His faithfulness did.

The second theme that is woven here through verses 4–11 that we've also seen in the context is that of striving against sin itself. Look at verse 4. “You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin.” Look back up at verse 1. We are to “lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us.” So in both the race analogy as well as in the discipline analogy, in talking about discipline and in talking about the race, there is a sin issue that is at the heart of all of this.

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Why is discipline necessary? Not to punish us for our sin, but to purge us of our sin. That's the point of discipline. Again, we'll get into this more next week. It is not punishment for our sin, it is purging us from our sin. So we have an obligation, a moral obligation, to lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, to fight that fight, to wage that war, to go to battle against it. That's our obligation. But here's the good news. We have a Father in Heaven who loves us enough to do something to us to make that really easy—purging ourselves from sin. That's where discipline comes in.

The next theme is that of losing heart. Look at verse 5. He says, "My son"—look at the quotation from Proverbs chapter 3—"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him." That is the idea of losing heart, of losing spirit, of sort of collapsing within. It's the notion that was also up in verse 3, that we are to consider Him who endured such hostility against Himself at the hands of sinners so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. See how he's continuing the same idea? We are to run our race, and we are to do it with endurance and with faith, to persevere, to look to Jesus so that we don't lose heart. And then we have the Father who disciplines us for that purpose, and we are to embrace that so that we don't what? So that we don't lose heart.

The theme of enduring is also here. Endurance is a theme that has been present with us in Hebrews for quite some time. Look down to verse 7 in our passage. "It is for discipline that you endure." Have we heard about endurance anywhere in this context? "It is for discipline that you endure." Look at verse 1: we are to run with endurance the race that is set before us. Verse 3: we are to consider Him who endured such hostility against himself. In fact, the theme of endurance goes all the way back to chapter 10 at the very end, where he says, "You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised" (Heb. 10:36). So from back in chapter 10 he has been talking about enduring in the face of hostility, suffering, affliction, and difficulty, just as the saints of Hebrews chapter 11 did. And then you are to do it, chapter 12, verses 1–3. And then we have the Father disciplining us to enable us to run that race so that we don't lose heart. And it is for discipline that we are to endure. So the theme of endurance traces all the way through as well.

Then in verse 11, notice the reference to training. "To those who have been trained by it [that is, discipline], afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." The idea of training is core; it's central to the athletic metaphor. It fits the athletic analogy in verses

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1–3. So the author is not radically changing course at verse 4. I want you to see that. He's taking the same things he's been talking about really since the end of chapter 10, and now he's weaving them through chapter 11, and he's bringing them to an applicable conclusion in chapter 12, verses 1–11. We're to run our race, not lose heart, persevere through it because the Father in Heaven is disciplining us, training us, to enable us to do the very thing that He has called us to do. It is safe to say that the discipline that God wisely and lovingly brings into our lives is intended to work in us those things which will strengthen us for the race. The purpose of discipline is to strengthen you for the race. It is to train you for the race so that you will lay aside the sin that sometimes causes the discipline, and you will look to Jesus and run the race that is set before you and carry you across the finish line so that you can receive the reward.

Our job is to run; the Father's job is to discipline and train us so that we can run. Now, if the Father knows perfectly and precisely and wisely, infinitely so, what is necessary to bring you and I home to our eternal glory and to give us that reward, if He knows everything that is necessary for that to happen, why would you not embrace that, right? If He has called you to run, and then He knows exactly what is necessary to take you across the finish line and bring you to that reward and give it to you, why would you not embrace that thing that He has planned for you? Why would you not embrace that process and do so lovingly? Listen, especially if you know that it will, for all of eternity, infinitely increase your joy and your reward, you would embrace that, wouldn't you?

So now let's jump into verses 4 and 5. You say, Jim, that wasn't the first point, not even close yet. The proper perspective on discipline. Remember, I want to challenge you to embrace God's discipline in your life and to cooperate, as it were, with Him in the discipline and through the discipline so that it may accomplish what it is that He has designed for you in the difficulty that He has brought into place.

The proper perspective on discipline, verses 4–5. And this deals with our thinking, our mindset. We need a proper perspective on it so that we can think of it rightly. And when we think of it rightly, then we are more likely to embrace it. So we have a mindset here that is being described for embracing God's discipline. The mindset is in verse 4 and the beginning of verse 5, and then the manner in which we are to embrace God's discipline is in verse 5, the quotation from the Proverbs. So here's the mindset. "You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons. . . ." There's a mindset

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there, a way in which we are to view our afflictions and a way in which we are to view our relationship with the Lord.

And then the manner in which we are to embrace this discipline is in verse 5. “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord [In other words, don't despise His discipline. And then second, don't despair in that discipline.], nor faint when you are reproved by Him.” There are two errors that we can make when God disciplines us. One is to despise it, and the other is to despair underneath of it. These are two opposite errors. They're both folly in some regard. One of them is really caused by a vain, selfish pride, and the other one is caused by a foolish misunderstanding of the purpose of discipline.

So we want to have the right mindset for embracing discipline. That's what we're looking at today, the mindset that we have. And we're to remember two things. So if you're keeping track of your outline, those of you who like your outlines, here it is. Verse 1 was understanding the proper purpose of discipline. Under that is two points, if you're keeping notes, two points. Number one, we are to have the right mindset, and then [number two] the right manner of embracing discipline.

Under the first point [that we are to have the right mindset], there are two points. Number one, the afflictions that we endure are less than we deserve. And second, God disciplines His children, not His enemies. Those are the two things that affect our mindset.

So this is two points. Today we're going to deal with the first of the two points. Under the one of the two points, which is under one of the four points. Did you catch that? OK. It's really much more simple than I make it out to be. And there are some people—let me just say this real quick—there are some people who think that you have to spend all four of your homiletical points in one sermon. I don't believe that at all. I'm going to milk all four of these points so long, you're going to think that there's a Guernsey right here in the middle of the sanctuary, and we're going to take our time going through it.

So if you're not keeping track of the outline, then wake back up. This is where we jump into verse 4. Our mindset. We are to remember that the afflictions that we endure are less than we deserve. This is verse 4: “You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin.” Now notice that the author is aware of their affliction. He's aware of their suffering. He admits it, he knows it. Maybe because he has

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experienced some of what they have experienced. Do you remember back at the end of chapter 10, verse 32? Turn back there if you don't remember what they endured through; I'm going to read it. Verse 32: "But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one." They had endured all of that affliction, and he recognizes at the end of chapter 10 that their suffering was real, their affliction was real, their pain and agony in all of that was real. And from what the author describes here, it looks as if it is only, in his mind, about to get much worse. And he is equipping his readers to deal with that affliction. So he recognizes that at the end of chapter 10.

Then in chapter 11 he reminds them that this is not at all uncommon for the saints of God. You go through the catalog of the heroes of the faith, they all sacrificed something, they all endured something. It wasn't easy for any of them. There were good times and there were bad, yes. But some of them, you remember, they were sawn in two, they were stoned, they wandered about in caves and holes in the ground trying to find shelter. They endured all of those things. So what they were enduring was not out of the ordinary in terms of God's saints. And then in chapter 12, he counsels them to run the race with endurance, just as the heroes in chapter 11 have done.

So at the end of chapter 10: you're suffering. Hebrews chapter 11: What you're enduring is the same thing that all the saints of old have endured. How do you handle that? Chapter 12, verses 1–3: you're to run your race that is set before you with endurance, and do so looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith. So that's the theme of what the author has developed. But listen, he has not answered one key question that anybody with two brain cells to rub together in that congregation would have been asking. They would have had a very pressing question. *Why* do I endure these things? *Why* am I going through these things? If I am the object of God's love, His infinite and unbounding love, then why do I suffer? That's a good question, isn't it? *Why*, if I am elect, and I have been granted grace in Christ from eternity past, and the plan of salvation was hatched with me in mind, and the Son came to live in my place and to die in my place and to rise again in my place and then to bring me to Himself and to secure me everlastingly and then to pour out upon me His infinite grace and love for all of eternity—if that is the plan, and if that was the object of my salvation, if all of those

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things are true, then why is the heavy hand of God upon me in this life? It's a very good question. If I've been granted all of the blessings of the new covenant, and the blessings of the new covenant and the Spirit are mine, and the Word of God is mine, and salvation is mine, then why do I feel like God is against me in this life? Why do I suffer? Why does it feel like I'm being punished for my sin? If all my sin was laid upon Jesus Christ on the cross, then why now do I feel like I'm being punished for the things that I have done?

See, that's the question the author up to this point has not answered. I've been adopted into God's family. Can I not, at least in some way, enjoy some of the family comforts? There are saints who ask themselves these questions. I'm in the new covenant and I have received the fullness, and yet I suffer persecution and hatred from the world and ostracization, affliction, and pain and trials and tribulations and temptations. This is my lot in all of this life. Why is it, why is it that it always seems as if God's enemies have the upper hand? If you've never asked yourself that question, you are not watching the news. Why is it that it always seems as if God's enemies have the upper hand and we have to suffer the afflictions? He answers that question in verses 4–11. The Father is doing something through these things that is for your good. It is a proof of His love. That is why you are enduring these things.

You see how the author, since chapter 10, has been building to this point? Now you get to chapter 12 and you realize, OK, the reason I endure the seizure of my property, the trials, the tribulations, the mockery, and the insults, the hatred of the world, being pushed out of polite society—the reason that people hate me is the Father has allowed these things, yea, even ordained these things for me and for my good. And that's not just to talk about the affliction and suffering that you experience because other people just hate you and you're a Christian. But these things apply also to the physical disabilities that plague us in this life, the way that life sometimes just falls out, and it's not anybody's fault, it's just a result of living in a sin-cursed and fallen world. God ordains these things for us as well. Why? Because He loves us and because we are His sons.

And the afflictions that we endure in this life are far less than we deserve. He is calling us in this passage to a proper estimate of our sufferings. “You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin.” Notice that they were striving against sin and they were resisting temptation and they were engaged in a great conflict and they had paid a price for their faithfulness—we know all of that—but not to the point of shedding blood. What does the author mean by that? He means that it has not

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yet cost you what it might and could end up costing you. The fight against sin could be more intense than it is. You've resisted, yes, but not to the point of shedding blood. OK, so this helps frame the mindset in which I must view my war against sin and my struggle in this world. It hasn't cost me. The temptations always could be worse, right? The struggle always could cost me more than it has, right? That's true. Temptations can always be more acute, more severe, and more long-lived. So, yeah, I've resisted, but not as much as I might have resisted had things turned out differently.

Their fight for their faithfulness and their endurance had not cost them yet everything. They had not shed their blood. It had not yet cost them their lives. They paid a price, but they hadn't paid the ultimate price. These were their lesser sufferings. And by this time, by the way—remember in church history—by this time that the author is writing this, they would have been familiar with saints who had shed their blood, who had been faithful unto death. Already Stephen in Acts chapters 7 and 8 had been stoned. Already by this time James, the Lord's brother, in Acts chapter 12 had been pierced with a sword and killed. So they are familiar with saints who had shed their blood and had paid the ultimate price. And this is a needful corrective. Yeah, you're striving. Yes, you're enduring. Yes, you're persevering. But it has not yet cost you what it has cost others. It has not yet cost you the ultimate price.

The great faithfulness of others ought to motivate us to our own faithfulness, by the way. I want you to catch this. Others had endured more and suffered more and sacrificed more. And you and I, always, when we look at what we are afflicted with in this life, we can always look at somebody else and say, yeah, but that hasn't happened to me yet. And if you can't find any example in any of your life or in all of church history where you can say of that person, yes, I may be afflicted, but that hasn't happened to me yet, then you just need to read a little bit more church history. You need to meet a few more people. And if nothing else, you need to look at Jesus Christ and realize, that has not happened to me yet. So I've resisted, but not yet to the point of shedding blood. The great faithfulness of others motivates us to faithfulness.

And friends, it is shameful for us to faint under lesser degrees of suffering. We can always know others who have endured more. And when we look at others who have endured more and then we say, yeah, but I just can't endure anything else, I can't endure more—it's a shameful thing for us to faint under sufferings and afflictions that are less than what others have endured. What have others endured? Some of them have shed their own blood.

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And by the way, don't miss this encouragement. The most that they can do to you is shed your blood. That's good news. That's the most the world can do is take your life. The most they can take from you is your blood. Once they have shed your blood and killed you, that's the most they can do to you. You say, Jim, that means they've taken everything. Oh no, they haven't taken everything, not even close. They can't take your forgiveness. They can't take away your justification. They can't rob you of your eternal reward. They can't remove your status as sons and daughters of God in Christ Jesus. They can't take away from you the new heavens and the new earth and your resurrected body. All they can do is shed your blood. That's the highest price that you will ever be asked to pay in this world in your striving against sin. Just your life. I promise you, no more. Just your life and no more. That's the most you'll be asked to pay.

And I would suggest to you that that is a small price to pay when you realize that the alternate is to spend eternity suffering for your own sins. Then you realize, my life is not that much, really. After all, it's just my blood. I've got a whole body full of it, at least I think. I've got a whole body full of it. So I can shed that. I can lose that. And if I'm asked to lose that for the sake of the truth, is that really that big of a deal? Because that's all they can take. Jesus said something similar when He said don't fear those who can kill the body, but fear the One who can cast both body and soul into Hell (Matt. 10:28). That's His point. The worst they can do to you in this life is take your life.

Notice also from verse 4 that God Himself appoints our afflictions. You've not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood. There's a recognition there that others had shed their blood and you have not. Who determines that? Who determines that somebody else suffers more than you or that you suffer more than somebody else? There's only one being in all of the universe who has decreed that and determined that, and that is God Himself. So He is the one who appoints our suffering and our afflictions.

Not everyone dies a martyr. Not everyone sheds their blood in striving against sin. Remember that Jesus said of Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail. . . ." (Luke 22:31–32). Jesus in that moment is saying to Peter, "The devil has asked permission to come after you, to attack you, to sift you like wheat, but I am praying for you." And if you are Peter, you would want to know the answer to this question: "So did you give the devil permission or not?" "He's asked for permission from me, and I'm praying for you." "OK, the prayer is good, Lord, but there's another question we need to deal with. Did you say yes or did you say no?"

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But the point is not whether He said yes or no. The point of that temptation, the point of Peter's trial, is to show us, number one, that there is nothing that the devil could do to Peter that he was not given permission to do. Same thing with Job. Remember Job chapter 1. And the second point of that trial is that Jesus preserved Peter all the way through that denial and all the way through to his restoration and then used him greatly afterward.

God has appointed these afflictions for us. Nobody else has. Nobody can come at us, nobody can do anything to us unless it is appointed and designed by God to that end. And He appointed, by the way, afflictions and sufferings for His own Son, the Righteous One, in whom He is well pleased. And if the Father will teach the Son obedience through the things that He suffered, and if the Father will allow afflictions and suffering into the life of His only begotten Son, the one upon whom He has set His love from eternity past, whom He loves with an infinite measure of love, how do you think that you and I will escape that? We cannot. You say, Jim, that terrifies me. It should not terrify you at all. Remember, the whole point of this message is not to terrify you but to remind you and encourage you to embrace the discipline because it is a good thing.

Given verse 3, who might the author have in mind when he says in verse 4, “You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood”? He has there the Lord Jesus Christ in mind. We are to consider Christ. Remember the beginning of verse 3—it was several weeks ago when we talked about this—the beginning of verse 3 where it says consider Him who endured such hostility at the hands of sinners. That word *consider* means to count up, to add up, like an accountant might do. Remember, it was the word that had to do with summing things up and adding things up so that you might compare it to some other sum or list of things that was added. And the idea being there that you consider the Lord Jesus Christ and His afflictions, and then you look at your own afflictions and you realize His far outweigh mine.

So in verse 4 when he says you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood, he is applying that very principle. When you tally up your own afflictions, your own hostility that you have endured at the hands of sinners, it does not compare to that which the Lord Jesus Christ has endured. We have not endured as He has endured. We have not suffered as He has suffered. We have not paid the full price. None of us has. And the truth is, thankfully, that none of us ever will pay a price like Jesus paid. Why? Because He paid the price that our sin deserves.

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So again, there is the reminder that whatever affliction I endure, it is not as great as it could be. It is really not as great as it *should* be if I got justice instead of grace. So this then reminds me that I will never suffer to the degree that the Lord Jesus suffered, because I will never suffer the infinite wrath of a holy God against me for all of my sin and rebellion. However heavy my afflictions or your afflictions are, we can take solace in the fact that they are lighter than they could be. Remember that. However heavy they are, they're much lighter than they could be. And until you or I have suffered as much as Jesus has suffered for our sin, we are getting off really easy no matter what we endure in this life. No matter what affliction or suffering or discipline comes into our lives, it is far less than our sin merits. Far less. We cannot even fathom in our minds what our sin merits. This is why the psalmist says, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute [his] iniquity" (Psalm 32:2).

O Lord, if You were to count up my transgressions, who could stand? Who could stand before Him? Who could stand before God's holy bar, standing there in His presence, and have God start to list his sins and his iniquities? Could any of us stand before that? No, we couldn't. And what would we get if we got what we deserved for that? We would get eternal separation from God under His wrath, in the torments of Hell, in bodily punishment forever and ever and ever. That is what my sin has merited. So no matter what discipline comes into my life in this life, it's less than I deserve. It's less than it could be. It's less than I really would get if it were not for the grace of God. When I remember that and I compare the two, this is the beginning step to having the mindset to embrace the discipline of God in our lives.

To be clear—we're going to get into more of this next week, and I don't want you to misunderstand me, so I don't want to leave you hanging on this—to be clear, God's discipline is not punishment for our sins. Who paid for your sins? Christ did. I'll develop this next week. Who paid for your sins? Christ did. So whatever discipline comes into your life, it is not a punishment or a payment for your sin. God has exacted in full every last measure of the debt that your sins merited, laying them upon His Son and punishing them fully in Christ. He has borne all of that wrath. He has drunk that cup down to the last bitter drop for our wrath. So there is no punishment to be meted out to God's people, none whatsoever. So discipline is not about punishment. Christ has borne that punishment. Discipline is about being trained in righteousness. So whatever you are going through, you will always be wrong, always be in error, and always be saying something false if you say God is punishing me for my sins. God is not unjust, and He is

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not unloving, and it would be both unloving and unjust for God to punish His Son for your sins and then to punish you for some sin. Discipline is not God's punishment for your sin.

This is the proper perspective: God's discipline, our afflictions, though they cost us things—our faithfulness, though it may cost us, it has not cost us yet everything, and it has not cost us what it cost others. And whatever it has cost us, it costs us far less than we deserve.

Now, what sin is it that they were resisting? This is something that is true regarding reference to sin in general, that you and I strive against sin, but it is also something that is true of a specific sin that this congregation in the first century would have been struggling with. They were faced with the temptation—and persecution helped bring about this temptation—they were faced with the temptation to step back in their profession of faith in Christ, to abandon their confidence that they had in Christ. Because having come out of Judaism and having left the temple worship and all of the forms and figures of Old Testament Judaism, now they have come to Christ and they have none of that. They have left and come out of that into a new covenant community, the church, and now all of their old family and friends who were part of that Judaism and the old system, they were now persecuting them. And this congregation then would have been facing the very real temptation that would have said, if I just give up my confession of Christ, abandon my confidence in Him, and go back to what I had before when things were easy, life would be easier. But it would also be sin, wouldn't it, to abandon that?

So that's the temptation that they are facing, the temptation to abandon their profession and to fall back and to walk away. To basically give in and deny Christ and thus apostatize. That was the sin that presented itself. And these believers had then to resist that sin and to strive against that sin, and the more they resisted the temptation to apostatize and go back and make it easy on themselves, the worse and worse it got for them. So he says you've not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin. That is the sin. The sin that they had to fight was the temptation and the sin of denying Christ in a context in which professing Christ was ultimately probably going to cost them everything. To deny Him would be a sin. To remain silent would be a sin. To adopt the perspective of this world and its values would have been their sin. To abandon their profession, give up their confidence in Christ for ease and comfort and relief from affliction and persecution would have been sin. They had to resist. They had

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to strive against it. And that was the temptation that they had to endure and not give in to.

Say you grew up in a Christian family. Look, none of my kids are facing persecution for being Christians from their family members. None of them are. Probably not very many people in here are really striving against the sin or the temptation of abandoning Christ just so your life will be easier. At least, not at this point we aren't. It may come around sometime in our lives. We don't know. But at this point, we don't face that. But we do, nonetheless, strive against sin, and we are obligated to strive against sin. Notice how the author assumes that in verse 4. You're not resisting to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin. This was nothing unique for them. And it is something that is true of every believer, that every believer has a responsibility to strive against sin. If you are in Christ, this is your lifelong war.

The word *striving* here is *antagōnizomai*. *Antagōnizomai*. And it means to struggle or to strive or to conflict with. And you can hear the word, our English word, *antagonism* or *antagonist* in that word *antagōnizomai*, to antagonize someone. So when you're antagonizing someone, you're picking a fight with them, you're striving against them, you're struggling against them. That's what an antagonist does. An antagonist doesn't make life easy for you. And as sin's antagonist, you should not make life easy for your sin. This is what it means to go to war with your sin, to say no to it, to resist it, to not yield your instruments as members of unrighteousness, but to yield them instead as instruments of righteousness to do the will of God. Our striving against sin means that we repent of sin, we kill it, we mortify it, we put it to death. It's not easy, but it is essential. And whether that sin is the temptation to deny Christ in order to make your life easier, as it was for them, or whether that sin is the temptation to lust or to lie or to be lazy or whatever the sin is, you and I are to strive against it, to be an antagonist against the sin in our own lives.

You and I cannot hope—we cannot possibly hope to persevere in faith faithfully and receive the reward if we will not fight the fight against indwelling sin. And this is the beauty of God's discipline. It helps us to fight the battle against indwelling sin. And if we understood how ugly, how hideous, and how horrid our indwelling sin is, which none of us here does, if we understood it, we would embrace that discipline, understanding that this is necessary for me to finish my race, for me to cross the finish line and to get the reward. And the Father knows exactly what my indwelling sin is, and He knows exactly what needs to happen to me and what I need to endure in order to get rid of that

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indwelling sin and to have that indwelling sin mortified. God's discipline makes the mortification or striving against sin easier, and therefore we should embrace it and we should love it.

Sin in us will strangle our faith. It will quench our holy desires. It will numb our conscience. It will cripple your walk with God. It will rob you of your assurance. And here's the kicker: it gives us nothing in return. It does all of that and gives us nothing in return.

A walk in faith is going to produce in us a striving against sin. And if there is no striving against sin, there is no true faith. Only believers strive against sin. Only believers hate their sin; unbelievers don't. And if there is no striving against it, then you have every reason to question whether it is genuine faith inside at all. We must strive against sin. It is our obligation.

So this is the very first thing that you and I must remember if we are to embrace God's loving discipline, that the afflictions that we endure are less than we deserve. The second thing of our mindset is that we have to remember that God's discipline is for His sons and not His enemies.

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