

Is God Punishing Me

Hebrews 12:7-11

Pastor John Street, April 7, 2019

Well, thank you, Cheryl. It's been a pleasure. My wife and I have been here this weekend and we have thoroughly enjoyed our time there at the conference. And now, with you here at Grace Fellowship, we ... my wife and I had been staying at the Cagle Hilton. It's been a wonderful place to stay and we have been served - by the way, if you ask Katie to serve you any egg souffle, make sure you take advantage of that. Alright? Because she knows how to make it, and it's really, really good. So, we really enjoyed that a lot. And it's been a great pleasure for my wife and I to be here.

All the different hats I wear, one of them is that as an elder there at Grace Community Church, I serve on the ECHA Committee. That's called the "Elder Committee Handling Advancement," which is the Grace Advance Committee. And so, I know that Carl Hargrove and some of the guys that are on that particular committee would send their greetings to every one of you. And that's what I want to do this morning. And I want to be able to go back to that committee and give a good report on what Grace Fellowship Church is doing here in Chilliwack. What a tremendous ministry. I'm very impressed with everything that's going on here with your pastor and all that God has blessed you with. So, it's really great.

And this morning, we want to take a look at a message that is taken out of Hebrews chapter 12. But before we get into that particular passage, I want to ask you a couple of questions. In fact, this is in a sense a question that has been asked to me over and over again over the past 40 plus years of ministry, sitting down, working with people that are going through various difficulties and trials that are going on in their life. And some of them have experienced horrendous trials. And oftentimes, people sitting across the desk from me with tears rolling down their face will say to me - will ask the honest question after describing to me all the horrors of what they have recently gone through, they'll ask the honest question, "Is God punishing me?" And it may be something that you've even wondered yourself. That particular question has in a sense, crossed your mind. "With all that I have gone through, with the circumstances and difficulties that I've encountered, is this something that has happened to me? Is God punishing me because of my sin? Is that really what's going on?" That's a great question. It's a very honest question.

And if you want to take your Bible and turn it to Hebrews chapter 12, because of the shortness of time, we're going to zero in on verses 7 through 11 and highlight four main things in there. And I would encourage you to write these four main things down because at some particular point in your life, you're going to need them or you're going to run into somebody who will really need them. So, I'm going to encourage you to write these four things down.

But before I get into this particular passage, I want to highlight for you an experience that I had back about 10 years ago. I once in a while have an opportunity to travel about every other year to Switzerland and Germany and do pastoral training there with numerous pastors from all over that part of Europe. And I thoroughly enjoy it. I have linked up with the European Biblical Training Center there in Berlin, Germany, and those guys are just tremendous guys to work with. They

love the Lord and they want to see the Gospel. And of course, the state churches there are essentially dead. And so, the only live churches that are going on are churches that are really committed to the Gospel. And we're right in the focal point of that.

And one day, I was doing training. We had just flown into Cologne, Germany, and we were doing training for about three or four days there in Cologne. There were 200 pastors and their wives that had come from all over Germany and different places all over Europe for this particular training. And it was the first day of the training and we had been teaching all day long. It started at nine o'clock in the morning and it ended at eight o'clock at night.

So, off and on, myself and another guy that came with me, we were teaching every other hour. And then we had translators. In fact, the translator that was with me that translated it into German... I know enough German to be dangerous, so I don't want to try to speak in German... So the translator that was working with me is actually a graduate of our seminary. Grew up in Switzerland, spoke German fluently, and then spent actually some of his high school years in the United States, graduated. And so, he spoke English fluently as well, without even an accent. His name was Martin Manton. He was a tall guy. He actually played American football of all things. Tall, bald-headed guy from Switzerland and wonderful friend. And he's a great translator. He can translate as fluently as I talk. I don't even have to pause when I'm talking. He just translates right as I'm going along. That's how well he's able to do that.

And so, I had the last session of the day. And we were going through and it was about an hours' session and I finished the session and I closed in prayer. And after the prayer, Martin and I were folding up our notes and stuff up in front of the church there in Cologne. And I could see in my peripheral vision a lady making her way down the aisle and had a scarf tied around her. She was an older lady, probably in her mid-70s, had a long coat on. And one of the first things I noticed as I'm wrapping up my notes, is she had very swollen ankles which suggested congestive heart failure. And so, she made her way up to me and she grabbed my translator's arm. This little lady grabs my big translator's arm and points a boney finger at me, alright? And I thought, "Oh my goodness, what have I said?" And Martin turns to me and says, "This lady wants to talk with you." And so, I'm ready to say, "It's at eight o'clock in the evening." I'm ready to say, "Listen, I'm not responsible for anything I say after eight o'clock in the evening, especially after teaching all day that day." And before I could say that, Martin says, "She wants to tell you something she's never told anyone her entire life." When a 75-year-old lady says that kind of thing, she's got my attention. I said, "Okay, well, tell her let's go over here to the side and we'll sit down and talk with her." So, we went off to the side, we sat down and had prayer with her and I said, "Tell me what's on your heart." And this lady, sweet, sweet lady started into a story on her life. It took her well over an hour to express this story and she didn't tell me everything. But I'm going to give you a little teeny snippet of her story.

She was actually born in Russia. And if you know anything about history, you know back in the late 1700s, when Catherine the Great ruled Russia, after her husband had been assassinated, Russia was economically incredibly repressed. And at that particular time in the late 1700s, the best farmers in the world were German farmers. And so, Catherine the Great went to Germany and said (one thing that Russia had was lots and lots of land), "If you come and teach our farmers how you farm and all the techniques that you use, we'll give you huge plots of land." So, there

was a massive exodus of farmers from Germany to Russia. And even if you were to go to Russia today ... my wife and I were just a few years ago in Samara, Russia, which is right central Russia. There are German conclaves from back late 1700s that are still there. Very much, you can see the German influence all around in Russia at that particular time. But that's from all of those Russian farmers migrating to that area.

Well, her, this lady's actual forefathers actually, were part of that particular migration. She was born there in Russia to a father who was a pastor of a church. It was an illegal church actually. And of course, eventually when the communists took over Russia, then all the farmers lost all their land. It all became state land at that particular point. And then by the time the lady that I was talking to grew up, nobody owned any land at that particular point. And her father actually was the pastor of an illegal church that met out in the woods. Every Sunday, they worshipped God in the middle of the winter time. And there were about 300 people that were a part of this illegal church that was a part of Russia. And they worshipped every Sunday.

She grew up in that church, eventually became a teenager and fell in love with a young man that was a part of that particular church. Made a very, very tragic and sinful mistake and ended up spending the night, one night, with this particular young man. Through that one experience, she became pregnant. And of course, when her father and mother found out that she was pregnant, this brought shame upon her. It brought shame upon her father, shame upon the church. News spread throughout the - it was an incredible thing. And her father and mother were not sure exactly what to do. Abortion was not an option for them at all. So, she was going to need to carry this particular baby to full term. And in doing so, in carrying that child to full term, her mother and father were trying to seek a way where she could do it and still not be shamed in the process of it. And her uncle came along and proposed an idea, and that was that she be, actually find a job in another town. Go to that particular town, work the job, support herself, in a sense, give birth to the baby and then give it up for adoption, then come back. And that way, she can sort of save face.

She didn't like this idea at all but her parents didn't have any other options. And she described for me the day that they took her down to the train station and put her on the train, how angry she was at her father, how angry she was at her mother, how angry she was at her uncle. She was just so full of anger to go to this job that her uncle had gotten her. And in fact, the job was a two-day journey away on a train. And she got on that train, she didn't even say goodbye to her mother, goodbye to her father or anyone. And that was the last time she ever saw them. The last time. Got on a train, went two days' journey. Finally, it was on the edge of Siberia, got off the train. Somebody met her there, took her to her job. And she was horrified to find out that this job that her uncle had gotten her was actually in a prison camp. And she was a cook in the prison camp. She was the only cook, and she was responsible for serving two meals a day. She's the only one that worked in the kitchen for over 500 men. And she was the only female in that camp.

And then she began to describe for me how day after day, sometimes repeatedly how she was raped in that camp. And the tears flowed down her face. And I looked at my big translator and he's got tears in his eyes. And once in a while, she would lapse into speaking Russian. He didn't know Russian, he knew fluently German, French, and I think Italian. But he didn't know Russian. He kept saying to her, "No, no, no, say that in German again. Say that in a German

again.” And so, as a result of that, there was a big … I mean, this went on literally for months and months.

One day, she was walking into town in the middle of a winter time, there was snow on either side of the road. She was by herself. She's walking into the nearby town in order to get supplies for the kitchen. And her baby decided to come, and she described for me how she sat down in the snow....(And you must understand all the anger that has filled her life for months, months. And then all the things that have happened to her in this particular prison camp. She's just full of anger.)...how she delivered her own baby all by herself. She cut the umbilical cord and she took that baby and she threw it out over the ice and left the baby there. The tears just flowed down her face. She never told anybody this ever before.

Through a set of circumstances, she was able to get out away from that prison camp and she went to East Berlin. That's during the time that the wall was still up between East and West Berlin. She was able to get a job there. She wasn't there very long before she met a guy, they fell in love. This time she got married. Not long after she was married, she got pregnant. After he found out that she was pregnant, he didn't want to have anything to do with her. He left her and she never saw him again.

So, she works a job, she ends up for the next 18 years raising her daughter in that job under extreme poverty circumstances. Her daughter grows up, becomes 18 years of age, meets a young man. They fall in love, they get married. Her daughter ends up having her first baby and two months after the daughter gave birth to the baby, to her granddaughter, her daughter and son-in-law were in a terrible car accident, both of them were killed. And now, she's left to raise her granddaughter.

During that particular time, the wall between East and West Germany came down. When that happened, everybody in poverty stricken East Germany flooded into West Germany, and she was a part of that flood and she located in the city of Cologne. Found a job there, started working the job, started raising her granddaughter. And her granddaughter then for the next 12 years was living with her (mom and dad's dead). She's raising her granddaughter and her granddaughter begins to attend the very church that I was speaking in.

Through that experience, her granddaughter comes to Christ, gloriously reborn as a new Christian. And she goes home and she starts saying to her grandmother, “Grandma, you got to go to church with me.” Grandma says, “I'm not interested.” But she kept being very persistent. “You've got to go to church with me. Come on grandma, you got to go to church.” “I'm not interested in church, not interested in church at all. I'm not interested in God, I'm not interested in the Bible, I'm not interested in that. I gave up on that a long time ago. Don't even talk to me about that.” Granddaughter was still persistent. “Grandma, you got to go to church with me.” Finally, she wore grandma down and grandma says, “I'll go to church with you one time. That's it. One time, and then I do not want you to speak of this anymore.” Grandma went to church with her granddaughter and in that one experience, God melted her hard heart. And grandma surrendered her life to Christ. That was just six months before we showed up. Grandma's a brand new Christian. And with tears running down her face, she's saying to me, “I want to know, is God punishing me?” That's a great question, isn't it? “I want to know, is God punishing me?”

Now, I saw that she had a little Bible there. I said, "Listen, I want you to grab your Bible for a moment." Now, I want you to grab your Bible too. Put a little marker in here where Hebrews 12 is. And I told her, "I want you to go over to Romans 8:1." Well, she didn't even know where the Book of Romans was. So, my translator had to find it for her. Romans 8:1, and I said, "I want you to read that to me." We turned over to that in her German Bible and she read in perfect German. "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

And I said, "Do you know who wrote that?" She says, "No, I don't know." I said, "A man by the name Paul. Did you know that Paul was an Apostle?" "Yeah." She says, "I think I remember that. Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ." I said, "Do you know what else about the story of the apostle Paul?" She said, "No." I said, "I want to let you know that the apostle Paul, before he was a Christian participated in the murder of Christians. He was a murderer." I said, "This is a murderer writing these words." And she looked at me and she looked down at her text and she looked at me again and she looked down at her text. "There's therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." And the biggest tears ever just started to flood her eyes.

And then I sat there and explained to her exactly what that verse meant, being in Jesus Christ and how Christ has lifted the guilt of that particular sin off of her shoulders. And I said to her, "Okay, now listen, I want you to go home tonight, I want you to memorize that verse and come back tomorrow and be able to quote it to me and tell me what does that mean in relationship to your life." She agreed to do that, which is a tall order for a 75-year-old lady. So, we had prayer with her, and by the way, it had been raining, pouring rain that whole day. She had walked several blocks in the rain to come to these meetings. I made sure she had a ride home.

Next morning, I saw Martin in the *foyer* of the church. (I know how to speak Canadian). I saw him in the foyer of the church, I said, "Have you seen our lady?" He said, "No, I haven't seen her." And just then, she comes bursting through the back doors of the church making a beeline right to us, moving just about as fast as a 75-year-old lady can move. Alright? And she had the biggest toothless grand you ever saw in your life...like that on her face type of thing. And I said, "Martin, ask her if she can quote the verse." And he turns to me and says, "She already did." I said, "Well, how did she do?" "She did perfectly." And I said, "You know what that verse means, don't you?" I said to her and Martin translated for me, and she goes, "Yes, yes, I know what it means." She says, "I want you to know that the guilt that I have carried for over 55 years, it's gone. It's gone. The guilt that weighed me down for all of this time is gone." I said, "Why?" She said, "It's because of Christ. He took my sin and the guilt of my sin." I said, "Yeah, that's right. That's it."

Let's go back to Hebrews 12. I want you to look at this real carefully. There's four things I want you to write down here. Listen very carefully. Look at verse 7. Verse 7 says, "It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" Now, number one, I want you to understand this; I must view hardship as God's discipline. I've got to view that. No matter how great the hardship may be, no matter how little it may be, I must view all hardship in my life as God's discipline. That's the first thing you got to nail down here. Follow me on this - I must view all the hardship as God's discipline in my life. God's very clear about that. He's dealing with us as with sons.

In fact, if I were to translate this in a sense, John Street's translation of this verse, it would be something like this: we are to endure all hardship, or all discipline, as hardship. We are to endure all discipline as hardship or all hardship as discipline, whatever it may be. God deals with us as with sons. And he uses the analogy, "What son is there whom his father does not discipline."

Now, you've got to understand that this is the way our Lord works. How do we know that? Because when you study the history of redemption, this is the way He's always worked with His people. Things haven't changed in that sense. In fact, while you still have an opportunity, I want you to take your Bible and let's go back to Deuteronomy chapter 8 just for a moment and look what He did in relationship to the people of Israel.

Deuteronomy 8:2, it says, "You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not." Now, I want you to understand in this particular verse that when he says that, "He humbled you, testing you, to know what was in your heart," God did not test the people of Israel so that He could know what was in their hearts. Why? Well, because He's omniscient. He already knew what was in their hearts. He is an all-knowing God. God didn't test them so that He could know what was in their hearts. He already knew what was in their hearts. Why did He test them? He tested them so that they would know what was in their hearts. There's the difference. We have a tendency to think we already know what's in our hearts, right? We have a tendency to think we already know what our heart says, but God says, "No, you don't. You don't know what's in your heart until your heart is put under pressure." And when your heart is put under pressure, all of a sudden things start to come up and you say, "Oh my goodness, I can't believe that I said that to my husband. I can't believe I said that to my wife. I can't believe I did that to my children. I can't believe I did this," because it was already preexistent there in your heart, and it's the pressure of the situation that brought it out.

Sometimes I say to my counselees, "Listen, if I have a sponge and I hold it over my Bible and I squeeze that sponge really, really hard, and my Bible gets soaking wet, why is my Bible soaking wet?" They look at me and kind of roll their eyes and say, "Well, because you squeezed the sponge, duh!" Alright? "No, no, no, no," I say, "That's not the reason why my Bible's soaking wet. The reason why my Bible is soaking wet is because there was water in the sponge." Why is it, why is it that people do hateful mean things when they think themselves to be really pretty good? Because you put them in a pressure situation, in an argument, conflict between a husband and a wife, a conflict that goes on in their family, a conflict with another friend, that kind of thing. And the pressure is turned up on their heart, then all of a sudden the wicked evil things come out of the heart that they didn't even know that was there.

God had to take the people of Israel through 40 years of a wilderness experience in order to bring about a knowledge of their own hearts so that they will know. And twice here he says, God humbled them. Notice this, he said, "He humbled you," there in verse 2. And then in verse 3 he says,

3 He humbled you [a second time] and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna that you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that

man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. 4 Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. 5 Thus you are to know in your heart, you are to know in your heart...[This is talking about God giving us heart knowledge of our own heart.]...5 You are to know in your heart that the Lord your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. 6 Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.

Now this is really key. You must understand God is preoccupied with testing our hearts. You understand that, right? Go over to Proverbs chapter 17. Look at this. Proverbs 17:3 says, "The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord (look at this) tests hearts." The Lord tests hearts. He tests your heart. This is what He does. That's Proverbs 17:3.

Let's go over to Psalm 119:67. Psalm 119, here the psalmist says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your Word." In other words, "Affliction helps me to learn how to obey God better because I see the weaknesses of my own heart. Before I was afflicted, I went astray." You skip down and look at verse 71, it says, "It was good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes." "It was a good thing," the psalmist says. And then you skip down to verse 73, "Your hands made me..." That's by the way, Hebrew past tense "...and fashioned me" That's Hebrew imperfect tense: that means God made me in the past, but He continues to fashion me now. God's not done with me now. He made me in the past, continues to fashion me now you see. "Give me understanding that I may learn your commandments." Skip down to verse 75. Verse 75 says, "I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me." We have a tendency to think that God is being unfaithful to us when He afflicts us, right? I mean, we have a tendency to think, "Oh God, what are you doing? Aren't You being unfaithful? You're letting all this hardship come into my life." No, no, no, no, God's not being unfaithful to you, He's being faithful. The Psalmist says, "In faithfulness, He has afflicted me. He's being faithful to me when He does that." Skip down to verse 92. "If Your law had not been my delight, then I would have perished in my affliction [I would have been crushed under it.]"

So, the number one thing I want you to see is I must view all hardship as God's discipline. Whatever happens in my life, this is important that I view it. God is at work in my life. He is testing me just like we do fine metals. We put them in a hot furnace to purify them and then all the dross then comes and you scrape all the dross off until that metal, whether it's a precious metal like gold or silver, is now more purified. God is doing that. He puts us in the furnace of affliction in order to purify our heart so all the dross will come to the surface to take that particular ... I must view all discipline as God's discipline in my life. This is really, really critical.

Now, there's a second thing. Go back to Hebrews 12 in verse 8. Verse 8 says this - verse 8 and 9, "8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of our spirits, and live?" So, number one, I must view all hardship as God's discipline, but number two (listen to this, the second thing) when God brings hardship into my life, He's acting as a loving father. When He

brings hardship into my life, when God brings that into my life, He's acting as a loving father. This is really important to see. In other words, this is exactly what God says that a loving father does. A loving father doesn't just provide a comfortable life for his kids. He puts his kids through difficulties so that they grow up to be strong and they grow up knowledgeable about the things of this life. He gives kids chores. My kids hated chores just like your kids hate chores. But He gives them chores, why? Not to torment them, but to develop in them a maturity. In the same way God gives us hardship, not to torture us, but for the purpose of developing spiritual maturity in our lives. This is what God does. God is preoccupied with bringing these kind of hardships into our life in order to bring about more godliness and more holiness in our life.

So, number one, I must view hardship as God's discipline. Number two, when God brings hardship into my life, He's acting as a loving heavenly Father. You say, "Okay, I understand that so far, but you really still have not answered the question, is God punishing me?" Well, notice this, number three - I want you to look carefully at verse 10. "For they disciplined us [that is earthly fathers] for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good so that we may share in His holiness." You see that purpose clause at the end of that verse? "So that we may share in His holiness." So, number one, I must view all hardship as discipline. Number two, when God brings hardship into my life, He's acting as a loving father. Number three (listen carefully), this discipline is not punitive, it is corrective in order to bring about greater holiness in my life. Did you hear that? This discipline is not punitive, it is corrective in order to bring about greater holiness in my life. Why is it not punitive? Because Jesus Christ already paid for all of your sins. He's not punishing you so that you can pay for your sins, Christ already paid for your sins.

Roman Catholics believe that you still have to - yes, Jesus paid for some of your sins, but not all of them. You still have to add some of your suffering to Christ's suffering in order to have a complete atonement for sins. That's why you have to say so many "Hail Marys". That's the reason why you have to go repeatedly back to the mass over and over again, but that's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that Christ paid for all of our sins. Go back to Hebrews chapter 10, you can see this, the emphasis in verse 10, Hebrews 10:10. "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ [look at this] once for all." The implication is when He paid the punishment for your sin, it was completely paid for. No more payment or punishment is needed for your sin. We sang that in a couple of the tremendous songs that we sung earlier in the service. If you were following the words, they were tremendous. That's exactly what it says. Look at verse 14, "For by one offering He has perfected for all times those who are sanctified." Look at that, "One offering, perfected for all time those who are sanctified." Or really you could translate that "those who are being sanctified". So, this is in a sense, "He has perfected for all time" - that's our justification. He has paid for all of our sin, but at the same time, we are in the process of being sanctified. The sins that you commit now have already been paid for, but He is purifying those sins out of your heart.

That's the difference between justification and progressive sanctification. God is working in your life to purify your heart to bring you into conformity to what you have already been declared to be in Christ, justified like Him in Christ's likeness. So, in this life, He's bringing you into conformity to what you've already been declared to be in heaven. That is absolutely perfected. And you won't know that perfection until you get to heaven. That's the idea.

So, you understand that this discipline is not punitive. It is corrective in order to bring about greater holiness in my life. Notice, in Hebrews 12:10, he doesn't say, "They discipline us for a short time as seemed best in them, but He disciplines us for our good so that we may continue to be punished for our sins." He doesn't say that. He says, "So that we may share in His holiness now." So, as the hardship comes into my life, I realize that God is shaping my heart, helping me to understand the wickedness and sinfulness of my own heart, bringing these impurities to the surface, scraping off all the dross of my life. When I realize that even though I've been declared perfect in Christ, I still have sin in my life right now. This is such a key thing.

Now, there's a fourth thing. Look at verse 11. He says, "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." So, number one, I must view hardship (all hardship) as God's discipline in my life. Number two, when God brings hardship into my life, He's acting as a loving father. Number three, this discipline is not punitive, it is corrective in order to bring about greater holiness in my life. And then number four, look at this: the question then comes, really, how do I know that it's doing its job? Well, verse 11 answers it. Number four, I'll know when this hardship has done its job because my heart will be at peace. I'll know this hardship has done its job because my heart will be at peace. This is the peaceful fruit of righteousness. What are we talking about here? We're talking about the fact that we'll no longer fight with God over what's going on in our life. We'll no longer fight with Him. We'll no longer have anxiety over it. We're not going to say, "God, well, why is this going on in my life? I can't believe you allow these things to happen in my life!" Oh, no, no, we know why God allowed these things in our life; in order to bring about the peaceful fruit of righteousness, to purify us from sin, to make us more like Christ. That's what we know.

Let me go back to my German-Russian lady. Two years after I was there and I had that conversation with her, I saw her pastor in Germany. And I said, "Hey, how's so and so doing?" He goes, "Oh my goodness." He says, "This woman is a spark plug in our church." I said, "What do you mean?" "I mean, she's like 78-years-old now, isn't she? Or something?" "Yup, yup." He says, "Well, once a month we have a big church dinner..." (and there's about 5, 600 people in his church - big church dinner) "... She doesn't let anybody else in the kitchen. She fixes the whole thing. She fixes the whole thing." I said, "Well, you know where she learned that? It was in the prison camp there." He goes, "Yeah, yeah, I know." That's where she learned to do that. She learned how to prepare two meals a day for over 600 guys even though they were raping her. She learned how to do that, and she doesn't let anybody go into the kitchen. That's remarkable. She had turned a great deficit to a great asset in her life for God's honour and glory. That's it. You see?

Jonathan Edwards was one of the greatest theologians ever. While he was the president of New Jersey (later on, it became Princeton University), from a human perspective, he died prematurely, March 22nd, 1758 right during the time that Catherine the Great, or actually her husband, was reigning in Russia. He died from a smallpox inoculation. And upon his death, his grieving widow, Sarah Pierpont Edwards wrote to their daughter the following words, and I want you to listen to the words that she wrote. She said, "What shall I say? A holy and good God has covered us with a dark cloud. O that we may kiss the rod, and lay our hands over our mouths! The Lord has done it. But my God lives: and He has my heart, and we are all given to God."

Can you do that? Can you turn around and kiss the rod that just came across your back because the hand that holds that rod is Almighty God's hand? The rod that just came across your back, you go kiss the rod. Sarah loved her husband, it was a great loss in her life, but nevertheless, she realized that this was for her good long-term. One theologian put it like this, "Afflictions are as nails driven by the hand of grace which crucify us to the world." Afflictions are then blessings to us when we can bless God for afflictions, whose single view in causing us to pass through fire is only to separate the sin He hates from the soul He loves. That's wiping off the dross. That's what affliction does. It separates the sin God hates in our lives for the soul that He loves in our lives. That's what hardship does. Charles Spurgeon put it like this; I've learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the rock of ages. Can you do that? Can you kiss the wave that has just thrown you against the rocks?

There's four things you got to remember here. Hebrews 12:7-11, number one: I must view all hardship as God's discipline. Number two: when God brings hardship into my life, He's acting as a loving Father: Number three: this discipline is not punitive, it's corrective in order to bring about greater holiness in my life. And number four: how do I know it'll work? I'll know it's done its job because my heart will be at peace. My life will produce the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Let's bow for prayer.

Gracious Father, we thank you for what You've done in the person of Jesus Christ. We thank you for the guilt that You have lifted off of our shoulders. We thank you for the fact that You have fully and completely atoned for all of our sins. And because that, we are made joint heirs with Him, with the Father. Because of that, for all of eternity, we will be giving You praise and You continue to work in our life to bring us into conformity to Your Son, Jesus Christ, making us more holy, more godly.

Even through the difficulties that we experience, the hardships, we're not paying for any sins at all. If we were, we would be in hell. We're not paying for any sins. On the contrary, we're going through hardship and discipline in order to purify us from those sins. It's a corrective, loving discipline of a heavenly Father. And Father, help us to turn around and kiss the rod. This we pray in Christ's name, amen.