

The Endurance Of Faith – Part 1

Hebrews 12:1-11

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I want to read just the first two verses, and then I'll go back and set the context. Beginning in Hebrews 12:1 the writer of Hebrews says, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us,"—here's the injunction or exhortation—"run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

We saw in Hebrews 11 what was known as the examples of faith. The writer of Hebrews is writing to Jews who are getting discouraged. They were being persecuted and were wanting to go back to Judaism somewhat to avoid persecution, opposition, and difficulties. It'd be like today a Christian being discouraged because choosing to follow Christ you're going against the grain, against the current, and you're tired of the persecution or the opposition or the rejection and you want to go back to your old comfort zone. The writer of Hebrews set forth the superiority of Christ over the old covenant and then exhorted them to follow a new principle, which was faith, and we looked at Hebrews 11, "...the just shall live by faith," and all the Old Testament examples of the heroes of the faith. This is God's "Hall of Faith."

Technically, and I want you to see this, the first two verses, some scholars say the first three but for sure the first two, are actually the climax to Hebrews 11. When the Bible was originally written, it wasn't written with chapter-verse divisions. Many times the chapter divisions break into a middle of a section, and they're not really in the best places. Sometimes, when you're going from a chapter to another chapter, you want to read back, read ahead, and you want to look at the greater context. An important principle of interpreting Scripture is the context. Always look at the context—who wrote the book, to whom the book was written, why the book was written, what the circumstances were. In whatever verses you're looking at, always look at the context—the paragraph, the chapter, the book, the New Testament, Old Testament—of what is being established historically.

From Hebrews 11 into Hebrews 12 there is no break. It's really the climax. Those who lived by faith are the, "...great a cloud of witnesses." They're in the grandstands watching us. Picture the Christian life as running the race, it's the Greek Olympics, and they're cheering us on by their witness, their example, of faith. So, if these Old Testament saints could live by faith, and they had to look forward to the cross, we who look back at the cross should equally be able to live by faith; and we should be inspired by their testimony or their witness, verse 1, to us.

In Hebrews 12:1-2, we actually have the culmination or the climax of Hebrews 11. This is how we then should put it into practice. That's why it starts with, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us,"—and here is the one and only exhortation in our

verses tonight, there's another one in verse 28, but this is the first primary main point—"run with patience the race that is set before us." They had their race, Hebrews 11, they had their endurance. They ran it by faith, they endured, and they received the promise; so we too should run by faith, and we should have endurance. The main point is that we should be running the race with patience.

There are many pictures in the New Testament for the Christian life. The Christian life is like unto a soldier—we're in a spiritual warfare. The Christian life is that we are family and members of the family of God—God is our Father, and we're brothers and sisters in Christ. One of Paul's favorite analogies or pictures is that of running a race. Now, I'm not a runner. I'm sure you can look at me and tell that I'm not a runner. When I see people running I think, What for? We have cars. I'm driving down the street and see people running and I think, Oh, I'll pray for them. It is an awesome thing to be able to run, but in the Greek Olympics they were really big on running the race, the stadium was full of people, the contestants would be down there running on the field, and the winner would get a laurel wreath—a victor's crown, a *stephanos*. Paul used it all through his epistles. He said, "...I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness," and he talked about running the race in several different places in the New Testament. The picture for us in these verses, verses 1-2, are that we're all in a race.

Let me point out some facts about the race that we're running as believers, verse 1. First of all, as Christians we all are running. It's not an option. You might say, "Well, I don't run," but in the Christian life you are on the track, you are running a race, so we're all running a race. There's no, "May I be excused?" or "Lord, I don't want to run." If you're a believer, the moment you were born again you were placed on the track and you're running the race, "So run, that ye may obtain."

Secondly, it's a persistent daily running. When he says, "...let us run with patience," that phrase in the Greek is in the present tense, so it means keep on continually, habitually running. It's talking about a continual or persistent daily running. Every day when we get up, as believers, we need to remind ourselves, I am running a race.

Thirdly, it's a patience race, "...let us run with patience." The word "patience" actually means steadfast endurance. This is not a 100-meter dash or a sprint, this is a long-distance race. This is a lifelong race. By the way, the race starts at your justification or salvation, the moment you're born again, and it does not end until your glorification. Your glorification happens two ways: either we're raptured (the Lord comes and takes us to heaven by the rapture, catches us up to be in heaven, we get a new body) or we die, "...to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord," and then at the rapture we will get our new bodies where, "...the dead in Christ shall rise first." Amen? It starts at your justification, it ends at your glorification, and it's a long endurance race with many trials, testings, and hardships.

The fourth fact is that it's a predetermined race, "...the race that is set before us," actually indicates that God gives each one of us our own lane to run in. As they run in their race, they

each have their own lane and can't go out of that lane. God puts us where He wants us to be, God puts the circumstances He wants to allow in our lives, and He gives us a will and a purpose and a calling to run our race, so we want to, "...run with patience the race that is set before us."

The word "race" used in our text (appears in verse 1) is actually where we get our word agony or agonizo is the Greek word. We get our word agony from it. This is why, by the way, I don't run. I know, "No pain, no gain," but I don't want to agonize. The word "race" is where we actually get our word agony or agonizo. It comes from the word agonizo. It means to agonize or to labor, so we're all running a race, which indicates that the Christian life is hard, it's difficult. It's not easy. Some people say the Christian life is a cop out, that it's a crutch. No, it's not. It's hard to go against the flow, but we have the Holy Spirit inside of us, we have the Word of God in front of us, and we have the Lord with us to guide and direct us as we run this race.

The question is, how do we run? The answer is, verses 1-2, we run by looking at Jesus. I want to break it down for us. From the text I want to give you three ways to run. The first thing we need to do if we're going to run the race well and finish is remember the heroes of the past. I already pointed it out, go back to verse 1, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses," that is a reference to the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11. Don't misinterpret this statement and interpret it to mean that they're actually watching us from heaven. The word "witness" means to testify, and I have seen some Christians who actually say, "Well, people who die and go to heaven can see us. They're watching us." There's nothing in the Bible, by the way, and I don't want to tell you this to bum you out. You might be thinking that your great grandfather is watching you tonight from heaven. Your Father in heaven, God, is watching you, but there's nothing to indicate in the Bible that those who die and go to heaven can see us on the earth. If I'm in heaven, I don't know that I'd want to see what's going on on earth, especially that White House in Washington, D.C.

What it means is that they're testifying to us. It doesn't mean that they're looking at us or seeing us, so when we read Hebrews 11, their life of faith—their sacrifices of faith, their commitment of faith and trust in the Lord—is a testimony to us. Here's the picture: we're on the track running the race, they are in the grandstands and their lives are cheering us on, so we remember the heroes of the faith. When you read Hebrews 11, you might want to go back and read it all over again or study it all over again, let that be an inspiration and a testimony to you that you should live for the Lord and sacrifice for your service to Christ. That's the witness, remember the heroes of the past.

The second thing we need to do in our text, "...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." Look at it. It says, "...we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses,"—here's the first thing we need to do—"let us lay aside,"—it means to abandon or take off—"every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." The word "beset" in my King James Bible is entangle or ensnare. I want you to notice that there are two things we need to do when we run the Christian life. We need to take off the weight and the sin. The fact that they are differentiated, the fact that it says, "weight" and "sin," two different

words, indicates that the weight is not something necessarily sinful in and of itself, but it hinders us from running well.

You know, when you run a race...I'm obviously not the expert to talk about running. When people are doing track and field and are running a race, especially a 100-yard dash, they wear the minimal amount of clothing. That's one of the reasons why I don't do that. They wear little silky shorts, dainty little shoes—they hardly wear anything. They don't put on a football uniform. They don't wear shoulder pads. They don't have a helmet. They don't carry a boom box. They don't have a lunch box. They don't carry their phone. They strip down. By the way, in Bible days in the Greek Olympics, when they ran in the stadium, they ran with no clothes on. No wonder they ran fast, "Whooooah! I'm outta here!" They actually ran naked. The word "gymnasium," by the way, means to run or exercise naked. Don't try that, "Pastor told me it's biblical," but you want to eliminate weight. I found out today (I'd actually taught this passage many times) but the word "weight" was used by the medical profession to talk about body weight. Again, if you're going to run, you don't want body weight, right?, you want no weight at all. You want to trim down, slim down, get rid of your weight so that you have very little weight to carry as you run, so you get the weight off.

Again, it doesn't tell us what the "weight" is, but I like the idea that the "weight" is anything that hinders us from running the Christian life race from maximum efficiency, not wicked, not sinful in and of itself because it's separated from the "sin." Someone said, "If it's not a wing, it's a weight." It's either a wing or a weight. That means that we take out of our lives everything that doesn't help us in our running the race as we have it laying before us.

One commentary that I read actually said the weight could be discouragement or depression or fear or self pity, which is possible as well. If there's something in your life that is keeping you from prayer or from reading your Bible, from fellowship with believers, from sharing the gospel, keeping you from maximum efficiency, you do a little soul searching, Am I running with the weight off my life? Am I slimming down taking away anything that hinders me from maximum efficiency? If it's not a wing, it's a weight, "...let us lay aside every weight,"—here's the command, and by the way, this is an imperative, this chapter is full of commands or imperatives—"and the sin,"—not sins, but sin, some besetting sin that is in your life that keeps you from serving the Lord and being effective in His Kingdom. Tonight you need to ask yourself, "Do I have something in my life that's keeping me from running the race," or "Is there a sin in my life that I need to confess and forsake so that I can run the race that is set before me?"

Here's the third step, verse 2, "Looking unto Jesus." We remember the heroes of the past, we lay aside the weight and the sin of the present, and then we get our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ. One of the most important things that you can do as a believer is keep your eyes on the Lord. Amen? Don't get them on your problems, don't get them on people, don't get them on your circumstances; fix your eyes on Jesus Christ when you run the race. Another thing about running is that you want to keep your gaze on the finish line. When runners are running the race, they don't look up and wave at mom and dad in the grandstands, they don't look back to see if someone is gaining on them, they'll lose their stride, they have to stay focused. We often

have seen people running the race and maybe try to look back to see who's on them and they'll lose their stride and lose the race. Many times Christians make a big mistake and start looking around, looking back, instead of fixing their eyes upon Jesus who is said to be here, "...the author and finisher of our faith."

Look at verse 2, "Looking unto Jesus," that "looking unto" means to look with your eyes and heart to He who is, "...the author and finisher of our faith." The word "our" in my King James translation is italicized which indicates it's inserted by the translators to make a flow of thought, but it's better just to read that He's the, "...finisher of faith." He's the author, which means the originator. Sometimes that word is translated prince, but He's the originator or the source, and He's the, "...finisher of faith," so Jesus starts by justifying the unbeliever, and then He proceeds by sanctifying the believer, and then one day He glorifies us. He starts our faith with regeneration and salvation, He continues our faith by sanctification, and He completes our faith one day with glorification. What begins with grace will end in glory. Read Romans 8, whom he justifies, he sanctifies; whom he sanctifies, he glorifies. Paul said, "...that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." He's, "...the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him."

What is the "joy" that was set before Jesus Christ? I believe the joy set before Christ was the expectation that He would be able to save sinners and that He could justify, sanctify, and take them to glory. So, "...the joy that was set before him," is the church, the redemption of believers, you and me. It was the hope that He could redeem us, that He could justify us, that He could save us. He, "...endured the cross," by looking at the glory that would be His by being the Redeemer of mankind. Then it says He also, "...endured the cross," so He had the joy set before Him. This is His expectation. Then we have, He, "...endured the cross," this is His crucifixion. I love the statements about the cross here, "...endured the cross." It was not easy, it was difficult. Jesus suffered physically, greatly on the cross. He died by crucifixion.

Another thing it says, "...despising the shame." We have His expectation, "...who for the joy that was set before him;" we have His crucifixion, "...endured the cross," where He died as the substitution for our sins; and then we have His humiliation, I've always thought this was interesting, "...despising the shame." That little statement, "despising the shame" meant that Jesus went to the cross with the expectation that He would redeem sinners. He died a suffering, cruel death, but He also took shame and infamy upon Himself. He was spat on, He was mocked, He was ridiculed. I don't know about you but whenever I take Communion, I think not only about the physical suffering, but I think about the shame that He endured. He hung on that cross and cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—the jeering of the crowd—"He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God." He endured the shame of the cross, "...despising the shame."

When He was in Gethsemane and in agony, sweating great drops of blood, He said, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup,"—that was the cross—"pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Jesus, under the weight of the shame and the sin that would be placed upon Him and the agony, remember those three hours of darkness and He cried, "My God, my

God, why hast thou forsaken me?" that was all the shame and the agony and the pain that He went through. It was more than just the physical suffering, it also involved the humiliation and the shame.

Then it says, "...and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." This is His exaltation. I want you to notice it again. His expectation, "...the joy that was set before him;" His crucifixion, "...endured the cross;" His humiliation, "...despising the shame;" and His exaltation, "...and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." You have kind of a panoramic statement about Jesus coming and dying on the cross, taking our pain and our shame and our suffering and our sin, and then rising from the dead, ascending back to heaven, being exalted at the right hand of God the Father. So, keep your eyes on Jesus when you get discouraged, when you get weary, when you want to give up. From Hebrews 12:1-11, it really kind of wraps up, but we'll pick it up next week in verse 13. If you read verses 12-13, there's actually an exhortation to put into practice what you read in verses 1-11. He's telling us to keep our eyes on Jesus.

The race that we're running is a long-distance race. We must race with perseverance, steadfast endurance, and we do that by considering those who went before us, "...lay aside every weight, and the sin...Looking unto Jesus...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." This is intended to be a contrast with the "Heroes of Faith" in Hebrews 11. It is wonderful when you have godly examples that you can follow after. As Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." The ultimate example that we're to follow is Jesus Christ. It's fine to follow a spiritual individual, if they're following Christ, but make sure that your eyes are on Jesus because people will always let you down. Even as we read in Hebrews 11, the great "Hall of Faith" heroes, all had their shortcomings and weaknesses. Amen? Jesus Christ will never disappoint you. He will never fail you. He will never let you down. He will never not keep His promises. Any human being you put your faith and trust in will have flaws. All of us have feet of clay. It's a great "Hall of Faith," and wonderful to stand on the shoulders of giants, but keep your eyes on Jesus as you run this race that is set before you. It starts at your salvation and it ends at your glorification. It won't be over until you're dead.

I know when Chuck Smith passed away, I actually got a phone call—I'll never forget—from Pastor Raul Ries. I hadn't heard that Chuck had died, and he was just weeping on the phone. I said, "Raul, what's the matter?" He said, "Pastor Chuck went to be with the Lord today." We just kind of wept together, and then we both encouraged each other, "Keep running the race. It's not over for us, yet." Chuck's race came to a finish. He ran the race, he finished the course, crown of righteousness laid up for him, but we are still in the race. You may get tired, you may get weary, you may want to quit or go sit in the grandstands, you may want to throw in the towel, you may want to say, "I give up," but you're still running the race.

It's an interesting thing. In the Greek Olympics only one person could win the crown; in the Olympics today, only one person can get the gold medal; but in the Christian race, we'll all get a stephanos, and we're on the track that God has placed us on. Be faithful. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Don't get discouraged. Run the race. Life is full of difficulties, but don't give up.

Now, that leads us into our next section. It's quite lengthy, so we won't tarry on it, verses 3-11, where we run considering Jesus. We run, "Looking unto Jesus," verses 1-2; we run thinking about Jesus, verses 3-11. The writer of Hebrews says, "For consider him,"—so there's the point. The word "consider" there in verse 3 means serious perceptive contemplation. It means thinking down upon deeply. "For consider him,"—that is, Christ—"that endured such contradiction,"—that word "contradiction" means to be spoken against—"of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." That's exactly what was going on with the readers of this epistle. They were getting weary and fainting. In a long-distance race, if you don't keep your eyes on Jesus, you don't trust and look to Him, you can get tired, you can get weary. Amen? So, you need to keep considering Jesus as well as looking at Jesus.

Again, Jesus is our example. He was spoken against by sinners against Himself, and He didn't want them to, "...be wearied or faint in your minds." That's why, verse 3, we need to consider or think seriously about Jesus Christ. It prevents us from being weary and faint. That word "weary" actually is used in medical terms for sick, lest you get sick or discouraged. It's so easy in the Christian life to get discouraged, to get weary, you can get weak, and sometimes you can even get sick emotionally, spiritually—we don't want to do that—in our minds.

Verse 4, "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. 5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son,"—he's going to quote, beginning in verse 5 down to verse 6, Proverbs 3:11-12. He's quoting from the Old Testament book of Proverbs. "...despise not thou the chastening,"—here's the key word—"of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: 6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Here's some important instruction. This is a classic passage on the subject of God chastening His children. By the way, the word "to chasten" as used in the Bible always has in it the idea of instruction. It's not punitive. He's not punishing us, He's trying to direct and instruct us. It's the very same word that was used by Paul in Ephesians where parents are to raise their children, "...in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." That's a reference to parents disciplining their children, but you do it not to punish them, you do that to train them or to teach them.

Discipline from God to us, and from parents to their children, is to be for the purpose of instructing them. It's also used in 2 Timothy 3:16 where it says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." That phrase, "instruction in righteousness" is the same word translated chasten or chastisement. It appears in different forms. It appears in verse 5, "chastening," in verse 6, "chasteneth," in verse 7, "chastening" and again "chasteneth," but also in verse 8, "chastisement," and again in verses 10 and 11. About seven times in these verses you find the words chasten, chasteneth, or chastisement. If you are a child of God, you are running the race whether you like it or not. If you are a child of God, you will be chastened by your Father in heaven, by the Lord. No one is without chastisement, but it's for our good and for His glory so we need to be patient.

We're going to break it down in just a moment. It says that Jesus is what we should consider

because He, "...resisted unto blood," verse 4. In verse 3, "I don't want you to be weary or faint," but notice verse 4, "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood,"—that means, none of you have died yet. He's writing to these Hebrews that were discouraged. They were ready to faint. They were wanting to go back, and he's kind of saying, "Listen. Nobody's dead. You haven't died. Think about Jesus. He actually died for you. Now, if Jesus can die for you, a very cruel death, a very shameful death, why is it we find it so difficult to live for Him?"

I remember when I was a brand new Christian, I put a Christian bumper sticker on my car. I hadn't yet told my party buddies that I'd become a Christian. One day they saw the sticker on my car and said, "How did that get on your car?" I thought, Oh, no. I've gotta tell them I'm a Christian or make up some excuse. For a split second I thought I could say, "Well, some Christian must've stuck it there." I kind of (swallows hard) caught my breath, mustered up my courage and said, "I'm a Chrrrristian," and they just lambasted me. "You're what?! You're a Christian?" They freaked out. We think of that as being so difficult when yet Jesus had to die for me, so I thought, Poor little me, they laughed at my bumper sticker, but Jesus died on a cruel cross.

When he talks about considering Jesus, to think about Jesus, he's actually talking about what He suffered for us. Think about what He went through for us—He was thirsty, He was tired, He was hungry, He died on a cross, He was crucified for you—and we're worried about what people think or people laugh at our bumper sticker. We've, "not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." He says, "And ye have forgotten." That phrase can be taken either as it looks in the English translation of the King James, "ye have forgotten," or it could have a question mark, "Have you forgotten?" "...the exhortation,"—he's quoting from Proverbs 3—"which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not." The words "despise not," quoting from Proverbs 3, means to regard as small or is of no significance, to look at as unimportant. "...despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: 9 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." He's telling us here not to look at our chastening from the Lord as being small, unimportant, or insignificant. Now, two things: 1) He says we should not faint when we are rebuked, and 2) we should not think it's not important.

I want to give you five benefits or blessings—and we'll wrap this up as we move down to verse 11—of being chastened by the Lord. You don't really hear this preached very often because if we had a marquee in front of the church and I advertised I'm going to preach, "Come hear a sermon about being chastened by the Lord." I can't wait because, "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but," if we yield properly to chastisement, "it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness." If you're going to grow, if you're going to mature, if you're going to be like Jesus, you must suffer as well. If you're taking notes, write them down.

First of all, the blessing and benefit of chastisement is that it conveys God's love, verse 6, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth." I looked that word up today. It actually means to whip. It's talking kind of metaphorically. He doesn't physically whip us, but He does discipline us. It's the same word used for Jesus when He was lashed with a whip. He was

scourged. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." It's a mark, an evident sign, of God's love. You know, even in our earthly parents, if you have a parent that never disciplines a child, you ask yourself, "Do they really love that child?" A parent that really loves their children will discipline their children. Amen? If you care about your children, you're going to chasten them; if you don't care about them, you let them go. That's the thing. It's a mark of God's love. If you are a Christian, and God chastens you, I'll talk about how He does that in just a moment, you should hang onto the thought, It's an evident sign I am His child. He loves me. He loves me, and I belong to Him. God cares about me. It's so very important to remember that.

Secondly, it confirms our sonship, verses 7-8. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth,"—that word "dealeth" literally means to bring toward, so when God chastens us, He's not trying to push us away, He's trying to pull us closer to Him. "...with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" Who is a father who doesn't chasten their son? So, first it conveys His love; secondly, it confirms your sonship—you really are a child of God, that's why He's chastening you. Verse 8, "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye,"—illegitimate—"and not sons." It's a mark of our sonship.

Thirdly, if you're taking notes, verse 9, it corrects our faults. "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us,"—that word "corrected" is linked to and tied in with the same word chastise, it's to correct or chastise us—"and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection,"—there is the key—"unto the Father of spirits, and live?" If we have parents on earth, here in the context, it's our fathers, earthly fathers, which indicates that Dad should take the lead in disciplining in the home; and it's so important for Dad's to be in the home and to take the lead in discipline. Dad's in the home who are passive and expect their wife to do all the disciplining are making a big mistake. It doesn't mean they should be the only ones that discipline, but they should take the lead in being the disciplinarians in the home. He says, if you're without that, we are not legitimate children of God, so it confirms our sonship. As I mentioned in verse 9, it corrects our faults, "...we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection,"—I want you to note that phrase. We must be submitted to our Father in heaven and allow Him to discipline us that we may live.

The fourth, verse 10, is for our profit. It's closely related to verse 9, it corrects our faults, but it is for our blessing and for our profit. "For they verily for a few days,"—that's our earthly fathers—"chastened us after their own pleasure,"—they had their own guidelines and standards—"but he,"—that is, God—"for our profit,"—He's the perfect parent—"that we might be partakers of his holiness." The only way to grow in likeness to Jesus, to grow in holiness in likeness to God, is by being chastened of the Lord.

Lastly, verse 11, it produces spiritual fruit. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous." When God chastens us, He can do it in several ways: He can allow us to be sick, He can allow us to lose a loved one, He can allow us to have a physical infirmity. I'm convinced that God will use that sometimes to wake us up. You know, when the prodigal son left the father

and went into a far country and ended up—where?—in the pigpen feeding pigs, nobody was his friend, no one gave anything to help him, and even the pigs wouldn't share with him. What happened? He came to himself, right? He said, "How many hired servants in my father's house have bread to spare and I perish with hunger? I'm going to go back to my father and confess my sin and ask him to forgive me." That's a picture of how God, in His love, chastens us. You might actually think of it—God gives you a spanking. God allows some sorrow, God allows some hardship, God allows some suffering, God allows some difficulty, allows some circumstances to wake you up.

Do you know that when a shepherd had a sheep that strayed off the path a lot and got lost, sometimes the shepherd would actually break the sheep's leg. Guess what that sheep with the broken leg got to do? He got to ride on the back of the shepherd, and it created a very close bond. When the leg was better and the sheep was allowed to walk again, that sheep kept very, very, very close to the shepherd.

I learned a poem years ago that says:

I thank God for bitter things;

They've been a 'friend to grace';

They've driven me from paths of ease

To storm the secret place.

I thank Him for the friends who failed

To fill my heart's deep need;

They've driven me to the Savior's feet,

Upon His love to feed.

I'm grateful too, through all life's way

No one could satisfy,

And so I've found in God alone

My rich, my full supply!

I can tell you from experience in my own life that God has had to "spank" me many times. It's not pleasurable, it's difficult; but I know He loves me, I know He's got my good in mind, I know it's for His glory, I know that it will produce spiritual fruit, and I know that it'll make me more righteous like Christ. What you do is value character over comfort. It's closely related to our

study in James 1 about rejoicing when you are tried or tested knowing that it works patience. If you value character over comfort, you can rejoice that God's chastened you to bring you back upon the path. It's so very important.

Verse 11, it produces spiritual fruit. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward,"—notice afterward—"it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby," in other words those who surrender, those who yield their lives to Jesus Christ. That word "exercised" in verse 11 we get our word gymnasium from. That's where the word gymnasium comes from, the Greek word. Those who live for the Lord, yield to the Lord, surrender to the Lord, run the race, keep their eyes on Jesus, they have, "...the peaceable fruit of righteousness."

In John 15, Jesus said, "Abide in me, and I in you,"—you shall—"...bringeth forth much fruit." Without abiding in Christ, without looking to Christ, without running the race we cannot bear fruit for the glory of God. Let's pray.