

LOOKING OUT

“Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” —HEBREWS 12:3

The third direction in our journey to spiritual maturity is looking out. It is important we see beyond the tough and difficult situations as being hard luck, or something we've brought upon ourselves, but realize they are often a tool God is using to bring us into conformity with His Son.

As a parent disciplines their child, God disciplines us. Hebrews 12:5-7 says, “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you like sons.” Some of us may have a hard time accepting that, but none of our discrepancies are hidden from God. He disciplines us because He loves us, and many times it is through suffering we learn our greatest lessons.

Suffering and hardship is not something to be embarrassed about. When things are tough we often feel reluctant to share it with fellow Christians, because they might construe it as a sign of failure or lack of faith. It isn't. Despite being sinless, even Jesus had to learn obedience through hardship. Hebrews 5:8 tells us, “Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered...” This verse raises a big question: Was Jesus ever disobedient? No, but His

Father taught Him to learn obedience. This has nothing to do with the cross, but with the 30 silent years leading up to the cross; the way He worked, cared for His family and how He treated others.

As the goal for Christians is to be restored into the image of God, the tool for perfecting that is our hardships and sufferings. Paul writes, “If we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Romans 8:17). Suffering is again and again an investment in our spiritual growth and is given huge dignity in Scripture. Paul writes, “We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:3-4).

In my Bible, I have heavily underlined those two words, “suffering produces”. It isn’t prosperity that is the New Testament evidence of God’s blessing, but the real blessing is actually received in the tough situations of life. So we look out, beyond the hardships that come against us, and consider Jesus. We don’t lose heart and don’t grow weary, but allow our sufferings to be God’s tool in moulding us into who He wants us to be.

PRAYER: Dear Father, help me to look out beyond the hardships to your purpose for me. May they further my spiritual growth and deepen our relationship. Thank You, Lord.

TO REFLECT UPON: How have my hardships brought me closer to God?