

# Wisdom Through Suffering

Pastor Perry Burkholder

Before returning to our Mark study, we wanted to meditate on how we handle life's pain and hardship and suffering.

## Paralysis As a Gift?

In 2005, Pastor Perry witnessed his pastor (Rob) in the hospital suffering from paralysis from the neck down. He was a pastor from Cape Town, RSA.

How in the world could this Godly, amazing man be lying in the hospital with a paralyzed body?

Rob had contracted Guillain-Barré disease, where the immune system attacks the nervous system.

Perry's understanding of who God is was challenged. And what we see for a lot of us in the modern west is that our theology of God's goodness is put on the table for and discussion.

But Pastor Rob says to Perry, "We have to welcome trials as friends. Because they come to give us gifts that we lack and that we need."

But sickness and death are enemies, and they need be rid from this world. How can they possibly give us gifts?

In 2006, Pastor Rob, now fully healed visits Perry who was in the infirmary who was bleeding internally from the pressures of ministry.

And Pastor Rob says to Perry, “We have to welcome trials as friends. Because they come to give us gifts that we lack and that we need.”



This is when Pastor Perry realized a deficiency in this theology of pain and suffering.

What you need most when you are in hardship and suffering. The scriptures are replete with this theme: Wisdom is supreme above all things, and even if it costs you everything you have, get wisdom and a right understanding of God’s perspective and purpose in suffering.

## Going Backward to Go Forward

When we’re suffering in hardship, our tendency is to forget the truth. With that in mind, let’s read Hebrews 12:4-11:

### Hebrews 12:4-11

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It 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 the one he loves,  
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at

all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

*The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Heb 12:4–11.

The author of Hebrews links back to the idea in Proverbs 3, where there is a father speaking to a son, training him in wisdom. This could have been King David giving wisdom to King Solomon. And the author makes the appeal to read this as God the heavenly father giving this wisdom to the church today:

### **Proverbs 3:11-12**

My son, *do not despise* the Lord's discipline,  
and *do not resent* his rebuke,  
because the Lord disciplines those he loves,  
as a father the son he delights in.

*The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Pr 3:11–12.

Through the majority of the text, discipline does not equal punishment. The ideas in our mind is that the word discipline is the same root word from where we get pedagogy. It doesn't mean punishment, but classroom training and equipping so people can live life well.

Pedagogy is meant to be preparing the child for the hardship ahead; preparing them for the difficulties in the path of life.

The other root word translated as discipline is where we get our word gymnasium. It's like going to the gym to weight train or run hard.



So in Hebrews, discipline is linked with pedagogy and gymnasium training. It's meant to give one internal strength to run the race of life. This is not about punishment.

So, to read this verse with those connotations in mind:

Don't make light of the Lord's discipline; don't make light of the Lord's training. Don't minimize its value, and don't lose heart or motivation when the training is hard.

As tempting as it is to make light of God's training, it is far more tempting to despise the Lord's training when hardship comes.

Perry resented the pain of Pastor Rob's infirmity. But Pastor Rob invited Perry to view it through the Lord's perspective:

"We have to welcome trials as friends. Because they come to give us gifts that we lack and that we need."

## Wisdom

When life's storms rain and then pour, the invitation is for us to remember that this is the Lord' training, and that we can welcome the trials as friends, because they give us gifts that we need and that we lack.

The second part of his perspective is to understand his purpose. The Lord disciplines those he loves and delights in.



Good fathers love and delight in their children so much that they want to prepare them for the road ahead. Good fathers will tell their children no, rebuke them, correct them, and train them, so that they can mature emotionally, relationally, spiritually, and physically. Good parents are not permissive parents.

The wisdom we need is that we need to understand that God fathers us through hardship.

What gifts are you trying to bring into my life? What do I lack and need?



God is not disciplining you because he's angry with us, but because he delights in us and turns the works of the Accuser into training to persevere and succeed in life.

Endure hardship like you're going to the gym. Endure hardship like you are in a challenging class. The training is what God wants to give to you, whom he loves.

Nobody wakes up with endurance. Endurance is formed in the crucible of hardship.

And we need to understand all of this training in a relational context. We must see this training from the lens of a loving father with a son or daughter.

Whatever form of suffering and hardship we endure, we must remind ourselves, “I must endure this as training from a loving Father.”

The scripture assumes what good fathers do. They are neither permissive nor overbearing and abusive. But the reality is that right now, not all of us have good fathers. Some of us have had bad fathers, fathers who have abandoned them, and some don't even know their fathers.

And we believe that is why God gives us the church. He takes the brokenhearted and the abandoned and puts them in families. The church is a family where we can receive and learn pedagogy and training from spiritual fathers. Broken fatherhood can be redeemed in the church.

It's only in the family of God that we are safe to work this out. This is what the author of Hebrews is painting for us: a redemptive picture of what a blessed life looks like, despite the sufferings and hardship and brokenness that has so invaded our lives.

## **The Fruit**

What is the fruit of adopting the Lord's wisdom?

Peace.

No anxiety.

Becoming God's image.

Fulfilling God's original design for you.



God's purpose for the gifts he wants to give you is so that you can be a blessing to the world and help him bring heaven to earth.

The Accuser's plan is to deform you, distort your mind, and twist your understanding. He wants to take hardship and bend your design to image death instead of life.

## Consider Jesus

The author of Hebrews in the preceding verses urges us to consider Jesus, the savior, who endured suffering so that I could become a son or daughter that God delights in. His purpose in suffering was so that you can be adopted into the light instead of decaying in the dark.

### Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, **fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith**. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. **Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**

*The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Heb 12:1–3.

And the way we respond to Jesus' suffering for us is to submit to him, and submit to God as a loving father who delights in you and wants to prepare you for the road.



If you reject your lacking theology on suffering and accept YHWH God's perspective, it will produce the image of God, the image of righteousness, and peace in your life. You will look like life and blessing, rather than death.

