

I don't know about you, but this past week felt like a solid month.

Between two feet of snow that we had at my house last Sunday, I wore shorts on Friday to the office because it was hot.

My milk cow had her calf this week.

Yeah.

Yeah.

With every good story, there's also this... The winter storm of last week did claim my calf, unfortunately, so I lost my calf.

Very, very sad.

But I have a milk cow now that wants service twice a day, so my mornings and evenings end in the barn, taking care of my...

Bessie.

Her name's Clover, actually, but anyway, it's been quite a week for me.

It feels like my life has been turned upside down, but I began thinking of, as I sat down to prepare for this service this morning, I began thinking of where we were last week, and I just had this thought come to my mind, wow, my race of faith just picked up a lot of weights this week that I didn't really want.

with milking and feeding.

Have you ever milked cows with a machine?

Has anybody done that?

I don't know if you know this, for those of you who've never done it.

Cows don't stay clean.

They lay in everything, and I mean, they will... Yeah, and udders, when you get them ready to milk, man, it's not pretty.

I spend about as much time cleaning my cow as I do milking my cow.

And it didn't help that there was six inches of mud from all the snow from last week, but she likes to eat and sleep in the same spot, if you get the picture.

And so, there's a lot of cleaning that happens when you have a milk cow.

But last week we, and I got to thinking, I was like, man, I picked up a lot of extra stuff this week that I didn't necessarily want, and I'm waiting to be able to lay them aside.

But that was what our sermon was about last week, running this race of faith.

And it's not that it's a sprint.

We're not trying to get there in a hurry.

Life has its ebbs and flows and it takes its time going where it's going.

But we looked at last week that this race that we run, which is more of a marathon, it's a daily doing what needs to be done.

There's this cloud of witnesses that...

are not sitting in a stadium cheering us when we do good and booing us when we do bad.

It's a cloud of witnesses that are encouraging us in our day-to-day actions, giving examples of their lives of how to succeed, how to win, how to finish this race of faith that we have.

And from this great cloud of witnesses, we learn that we must take stock of our own lives just like they did.

And we have to learn to remove from our lives the sin that we have.

There's a sin that so easily besets us.

We have to learn to distance ourselves from that and do our best to not succumb to the temptations of sin around us.

But we also looked at weights, and these are things that aren't necessarily sinful, but there are things in our lives, whether we add them or not, thinking of my cow, that hinder our growth and our spiritual progress with God.

And we looked at how they can even be Christian-ese things.

They can be things that are good, inherently good, but yet...

If they take the place of us growing spiritually and following Jesus, then we have to learn to put those weights aside.

And that's difficult for us sometimes.

But to be able to do it, we have to be able to keep our eyes focused on Jesus.

It says, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

So we have to see what example he set, and we have to follow his example.

Because Jesus, as that author and finisher of our faith, gave us the road map.

It says that he endured the cross, he despised the shame, and now he is sitting down at the right hand of the Father.

Jesus was able to set aside and remove all the things that he had to.

He didn't have sin, but he was able to finish his race of faith faithfully.

And that's the example that we have.

So verse 3 in chapter 12 begins with these words, Consider him, that him is Jesus, consider him who has endured such hostility from sinners.

And this begins the discourse that focuses on the chastening of

or the discipline of God to his children so we're gonna start this verse 3 we're gonna read through verse 6 in Hebrews chapter 12 says for consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls you have not resisted the bloodshed striving against sin and you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as sons

My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by him.

For whom the Lord loves, he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives.

It's going to be a fun one today.

Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for your word this morning.

And Father, I ask that you would be with us this morning.

Amen.

Lord, there are things I feel like you would have me share this morning that are not easy to talk about.

But yet your word is meant to bring life.

Sometimes to bring life, we must remove what is dead.

Removing what is dead often hurts.

There's pain involved.

So Father, this morning as we dive into your word,

And as you open up this passage of Scripture to us, Father, I pray that you would truly anoint my lips and my mind to hear and to speak what you would have me to say, Father.

Lord, that I would do it with the spirit of grace and mercy and love.

But Father, also that you would anoint our hearts and our ears to hear what you would have us say.

Because sometimes it is these difficult conversations that brings about the biggest and best changes in our lives.

Father, this morning as we dive into this word, I pray that you would be with us.

Holy Spirit, I ask for your presence, that you would come and fill this place, and that everything that's done here today would bring glory to you.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Everybody awake?

I want you to hear the word this morning.

I even thought about maybe having you stand up and do jumping jacks, but I won't do that.

But I do have, I do want to give you an exercise.

How many of you want, like exercise?

Yeah, okay, there's a few of you.

How many of you like mental exercise?

Yes.

That's better.

Sometimes that's funner than regular exercise.

You didn't have to breathe this hard.

But I want to give you something this morning just for you to think about.

Don't shout out the answer.

It's not what this question is for.

And you can write it down if you want.

But it's something that it's an exercise that I did this week that I thoroughly enjoyed.

And I had a lot of fun doing it, and it really has not much to do with my sermon, but it does a little bit.

And I'm not going to give you the answer today or next week or the week after because you need to dig into Scripture to figure it out.

So if you're ready, this is not a gotcha joke.

This is the question that we have, and here it is.

Did Jesus experience the discipline of God?

I think our TVs died.

Did Jesus experience the discipline of God?

Again, don't answer that question.

But I do want you to think.

Because this question has several factors that you have to consider before you can come to an answer.

And I'm only going to give you one of them this morning.

There's several in there you need to think about.

But one of the most important factors to consider is your definition of the word discipline.

That's the only thing I'm going to give you.

You're on your own from that.

So think about it.

It's an interesting question.

Because I have my own personal opinion.

I arrived at it this week.

And it's an interesting thing because it can go one of two ways.

So, that's your homework.

Have at it.

This message this morning that I have to give is not an easy one, as I've shared already, because our view of God as the disciplinarian or the chastiser taints our theology one way or the other.

We either believe that God does chastise us, which could provoke fear in some.

Because we have a picture of someone who is disciplining.

We've all been disciplined in the past.

Some of it not very well.

Some of it not good.

And we oftentimes transfer these things to our Heavenly Father that we experienced on earth.

So if we are to view God as a chastiser, then it can provoke fear in some of us.

It can provoke the want or the need to get away from that person because there's anger and there's hate.

Excuse me.

Or we can believe that he does not discipline us.

because, you know, God is love.

God only gives good gifts, right?

I mean, my foolishness is my foolishness.

God's going to ignore my foolishness.

Now, these are two options.

These are two ways you can think about God.

And I think they're the most common.

We think in black or white thoughts, don't we?

It's got to be this or it's got to be this.

But I think that there's more than one answer to this question about God.

And that's going to be the subject of our spiritual meal this morning, the discipline of God.

So as we look at these scriptures in Hebrews chapter 12, the whole chapter, and I hope that you're reading this whole chapter because it deals with this concept of God as the discipliner.

But I thought as I dove into this this morning, I wanted to remind us of the writer's reason for writing the book of Hebrews.

This is going to kind of set the stage of why the writer dives into this particular line of thought in this moment.

Because the people that he's writing to, the Jews who are Christians in the Jerusalem,

who had been saved, who were saved, who were following Christ, were contemplating going back to the old way.

They were contemplating going back to the sacrifices and the laws and the temple and all of these things because for them, well, it just wasn't working out like they were promised.

And they were thinking, well, there's got to be something else.

This can't be true.

And so the whole purpose for the book is to cause them to think about

whether they should leave the faith or not.

And of course, the writer is encouraging them not to, and we've talked about this for a little bit.

So as we read these passages of Scripture, think about that, that they're wanting to leave the faith, but the writer is telling them to stay firm in their faith, to hold fast to their faith.

So let's read verses 3 and 4 again, and we'll talk about them just a little bit.

It says, For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

You have not resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

As I was writing this sermon out, I ended up erasing almost a page and a half of my sermon.

Because I made an assumption and I took off.

I was like, I know what this means.

Didn't look anything up.

Didn't check anything out.

But something just hit me wrong as I was continuing.

And I was like, man, this seemed like the wheel was a little bit off balance.

Something wasn't right.

Something wasn't going the way it's supposed to go.

So I stopped and I looked up a word that I assumed I knew the meaning of.

The word was hostility.

Hostility.

And I thought it just was referencing back to Jesus enduring the cross.

That was a very hostile environment for Jesus.

Very rough time.

You know, he experienced hostility from the Jews because, well, they put him on a tree and they hung him up and killed him.

Sounds like hostility, yeah?

Common error.

And so, but that's not what it means.

That's not what it's referencing.

It's more in line with what the Jewish Christians were facing in their current race of faith.

That's why I wanted to remind us of what the book of Hebrews was for.

Because he's reminding them Jesus suffered the same hostility that you are today.

So don't get weary.

Don't get discouraged.

Jesus has already experienced this and they killed him for it.

It's okay.

Is that comforting to you?

But the word hostility in the Greek is the word antilogion.

Antilogion.

And it means contradiction or verbal disputes.

See, verse 3 is reminding them that Jesus also endured verbal disputes.

He was often in the streets of Jerusalem and at the temple arguing and speaking to the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the scribes and all the religious leaders, verbally combating their wrong theology with Jesus trying to correct it with correct theology.

And this is the fight that the Jewish Christians are having in the city of Jerusalem.

Because he goes on to tell them a little secret.

I know that it's just verbal because he's like, Jesus experienced these hostilities, but you haven't even dropped a single drop of blood yet.

Chill out, you whiny babies.

It's just conversation still.

There's not even violence yet.

You can't handle someone speaking against how you believe and you're willing to abandon your faith.

He's like, grow up.

Grow up a little bit.

Jesus endured this and shed every drop of blood he had.

You haven't even shed one drop yet.

So he encourages them

To not give up.

That's the whole purpose of the book.

Jesus didn't quit when he suffered this hostility.

Don't you quit either.

And it sets the stage for him to talk about discipline.

Because I have to admit, I spent a very long time reading chapter 12, verses 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

And the whole reason I just kept reading it, and I kept reading commentaries, and I just couldn't wrap my mind around it.

And I even called my dad, and I'm like, man, I don't get it.

He's talking about this cloud of witnesses.

He's talking about laying aside this sin.

He's talking about enduring hostility.

And then it's discipline.

I say, just...

It's hard for me to follow the flow and the thought that he has.

How does he arrive at discipline four verses away from talking about this great cloud of witnesses?

And it was really a struggle for me this week.

Because a lot of times, if you read the context, it helps you understand the writer's thinking and his flow and where he's going.

I struggled with that this week.

And I don't even know that I have a great answer for you this week.

I think I'm going to get there next week because this is going to end up being part one.

And we're going to talk about God's discipline again next week.

But he arrives at discipline.

So we're going to talk about God's discipline this morning.

So as I study these passages of Scripture...

The question that I asked was, well, what does God's discipline involve?

I think that's a good question to ask.

How does God discipline?

I think I want to know that.

So he answers that.

Hebrews 12, verses 5 and 6 says, Have you forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as sons?

My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by him.

For whom the Lord loves, he chastens and scourges every son that he receives.

This is, of course, quoted from the book of Proverbs, and he shares two ways in this passage that God rebukes

Those whom He loves, His sons.

He will rebuke us, found in verse 5.

And verse 6 says He will scourge us.

Wow.

It's going to be fun.

Do not despise or be discouraged when the Lord rebukes you.

Let's look at rebuking first.

The word rebuke is a verbal reproof.

It can be used for correction.

It can also be used for instruction.

It doesn't always have to be fixing something that's wrong, but it can be saying, hey, this is how you do something and rebuking maybe a thought or a way that you are doing something.

So we can be rebuked.

I'm a husband and a father.

Man, all of my kids are gone.

Oh no, my daughter's upstairs.

I don't have anybody to look at me weird today.

I'm a husband and a father, and I have at times had to rebuke my kids.

And when I'm brave enough, I've had to rebuke my wife.

23 years of marriage next month, and I've only done it twice.

I was brave twice.

No.

But there are times when we

have to rebuke people in our life.

There are also times when we are rebuked in our life.

And it's during these times when either they were doing something incorrect or they were doing something wrong, and there was an opportunity to speak to them and be like, hey, this is not how we do these things.

This is an incorrect way to do these things.

Here is a better way to do the same thing that's more efficient or a better way to do it.

And rebuke can come in any of these forms.

I know I'm going to fall into a vein of thought today where the discipline is more for the negative side.

I tried my hardest to not let it do that, but that's a part of it.

But not all discipline is correcting negative or sinful things.

There is discipline that can correct even doing something correct, but there's a better way to do it, and it's a form of discipline.

But I feel most of my sermon this morning falls into the vein of correction.

So just be aware that I understand that that's how this happened, but I understand that there's more to discipline than just correction.

So there are times when we have to speak to someone about something that they've done wrong.

And God uses this a lot for us.

He will speak to us when we're going astray or when we're doing something we shouldn't have.

And we've all experienced this.

in our lives.

And if you're reading through the Bible in a year, I just finished Numbers.

I know a few of you are reading, and Numbers is one of those great, great books that you just can't wait to get to the end.

And when you think you're there, there's like six more chapters left.

But in the book of Numbers, Moses, the friend of God, the humblest man to ever walk the earth, got angry and disobeyed God.

And God rebuked him.

He spoke to him.

Numbers chapter 20 verse 12.

It says, Then the Lord spoke to Moses.

And it's not the good speaking.

It was a stern speaking.

He says, Because you did not believe me to hollow me in the eyes of the children of Israel, you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.

There was a rebuke with a heavy consequence.

which is, in Moses' case here, probably a severe form of discipline for him.

His whole goal was to get into the promised land.

But because he chose not to believe in God and disobey him, he didn't lose his salvation.

He was still saved.

But he said, because of this, you will not enter into the land.

A strong rebuke from the Lord.

which is mindful of us because there's often times we fall into areas of unbelief or disbelief and we think, ah, God understands it's going to be okay.

But there are times when God is very serious about our walk of faith.

Disobedience to Him should not be something counted as

Meh.

Eh, it's okay.

Brother Louie gave a great service on forgiveness, and yes, the Lord does forgive.

But that doesn't mean there aren't consequences that come with our actions.

See, God will instruct us with rebukes and words of correction to keep us in the lane that we must run our race of faith in so that we don't veer off to the left or to the right, so that we don't get pulled or distracted into something and quit running.

He keeps us aligned, and He'll often do that with rebukes.

Now, if you're me, which you're not, but if you're me, I've often been rebuked by God, and often it comes from my daily reading of the Word of God.

As I open up the Word and I ask the Holy Spirit to speak to me, God will often correct me through His Word, saying, well, Will, you really sucked here.

Fix it.

I don't know how God talks to you, but He calls me on the carpet sometimes.

But there have also been times when God has sent people to speak to me, to give a word of correction, to tell me, hey, buddy, shape up.

My most memorable one of these, I'm not going to tell you what it was because that's for me.

But the most memorable one of these came from Brother Georgie.

I don't know if any of you remember Brother Georgie.

he's a tough guy.

And he doesn't mind calling it like it is.

And he was a, he's a missionary in Romania.

He was a former KGB wrestler.

So, I mean, he's not a small guy either.

And I looked up to him and his shoulders were twice as wide as mine.

And I was like, yes, sir.

Yes, sir.

I received that word.

But there are times when God will send people to speak words of rebuke to us.

And it's not to punish.

It's not to belittle.

It's not to make you less than.

All of God's discipline comes for one purpose.

And that's to bring life.

That's to bring us back to the path that we should be walking.

That's to bring us to a correct relationship of Him.

Remember, the whole point of this is that as we run this race, we are looking unto Jesus.

And if we choose to stop looking unto Jesus, there has to be some discipline that comes in to get us back in line.

Which is part of the reason that this is the train of thought that the writer uses.

But I think most of us understand and are okay with rebuking.

I mean, I'm okay to be told you're doing wrong.

The next one is a little bit more difficult for us to pallet, maybe.

Because there is another step that God can take.

Hebrews 12, verse 6 says, For whom the Lord loves, He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives.

I do want to put a caveat as I enter into this thought.

What's beautiful about both of these passages, verse 5 and verse 6, it's all prefaced with the words, for whom the Lord loves.

There's no hate.

There's no anger.

There's no violence.

These are coming from God to those whom He loves.

And it's also, as we get into this one, those whom He considers sons.

Who is it that God considers sons?

Those who have been saved.

So I'm not even talking about discipline for the unbeliever.

I'm talking about discipline for those whom God loves and calls them sons.

those who are in the faith, those who have called out to Jesus and had their sins forgiven and have the Holy Spirit living inside of them, these are things that you and I as believers will sometimes experience with God, not because He's mad, but because He loves you so much.

And I wish that I had an alternative meaning for the word scourge.

But guess what?

It means exactly what it says.

I can give you an alternative word for it, flogging, and if that makes you feel better.

But what's interesting about this word is the translation carries the meaning of sensible physical discipline.

So think about that as we talk about this.

Sensible physical discipline.

As I've kind of already said, this is not coming from a place of anger and violence and wrath.

It's coming from a place of love.

As a father who would spank his child, it's not to beat and bruise and make them bleed, but it's to correct or help them understand how they're wrong.

And so we have to think of it from a father's love.

Not from the perspective of Jesus at the cross with a Roman scourged Jesus.

That's a different scourging.

That's not what God does to us.

However, as with all scourging, it does come with pain.

So I do have to ask you one more time.

I know I've asked you a lot of questions, but as I enter into this last one, I want you to raise your hand if you believe God loves you.

Because God does love you.

You don't have to raise your hand for this one, but I'll ask you one more question.

Do you believe that God desires with an intense love to see you in heaven with Him?

He does.

He does so much love you.

He sent His only Son...

to earth, to live amongst us, to walk out this life, to endure the cross, to suffer the shame, the beatings,

The hostility of all the words spoken against him to be hung on a cross so that you and I can experience forgiveness because of Jesus' sacrifice.

That's how much God loves you.

He didn't even spare his own son from the humiliation of the cross, which was no cakewalk.

So when we talk about God giving pain to us, think about that.

He was willing to sacrifice his own son so that you and I could get to heaven.

That's the premise of where we're going with this this morning.

He was willing to send his son to the tortures and the beatings of the cross because his love for you was so great that he wanted you in heaven with him.

We don't understand a love like that.

But you know what?

There's a passage in Romans that I've always scratched my head at.

Because there's Paul who gives a demonstration, as best I can see, of humanly love that would be close to how God loves us.

He says in chapter 9, verse 3,

I wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, the Jewish people.

What he's saying there is, I would trade my salvation and spend eternity in hell if my Jewish brethren would accept Jesus as their Savior.

I want to tell you guys something.

I love you.

I ain't giving up my seat in heaven for you.

You're on your own.

You better figure it out.

But Paul loves his people so much.

The best example I have of godly love on earth, Paul says, I would choose to be accursed and go to hell if every Jewish brethren would accept Jesus.

So if being with God in eternity is the goal,

Is there any amount of physical pain in this life that is not worth turning us to Jesus or keeping us on the narrow path to heaven?

Job speaks to us in chapter 5 about suffering.

He knew a little bit about it.

He says, "...but consider the joy of those corrected by God."

Do not despise the discipline of the Almighty when you sin.

For though He wounds, He also bandages.

He strikes, but His hands also heal.

There's something about God that loves you so much, He's willing to inflict pain in your life so that you can be with Him in heaven.

Consider the joy...

of being corrected by God.

I read that and I chuckled a little bit and I was like, consider the joy.

I hate being corrected by God.

There's nothing fun about it.

But yet it's the thing that keeps us focused on Jesus.

Because what's great about God is though he wounds, he bandages up and brings life.

Though he strikes, he comes back with healing and he fixes.

When the discipline of God comes in the form of scourges, it does not seek death.

Rather, it seeks life, to turn us to life.

The wounds of God are meant to teach us that eternal pain awaits us if we choose to walk away from God.

A little bit of physical pain here is not worth an eternity of hell.

So discipline often comes to us in the form of pain applied to our life to instruct us of the error of our ways.

And God is not afraid to put pain in your life.

Amen!

He's not afraid to put pain in our life, especially if it will cause you to turn back to Him.

If you've wandered away or if you've wandered off the path, pain will often bring us back to Him.

I want to take you through one of my favorite minor prophets of the Old Testament and share a story as I close out the sermon this morning.

And if you have your Bible and you want to find it, it's the book of Hosea.

If not, I'll have the Scriptures up there.

If you don't know where Hosea is at, if you find the book of Ezekiel, it's pretty easy.

It's a lot of chapters.

You can flip over to Daniel after, then Hosea is right after that.

If you know where Jonah is at, it's a pretty common Old Testament Bible.

You've got to go three books back, and you can find the book of Hosea.

Little bitty book, hidden in there.

But in Bible college, my professor, my favorite professor...

highlighted this chapter, calling it the Hosea 2 principle.

Or, if you want another term, it's called the principle of pain.

Perfectly fit for our sermon this morning.

And I want to set up the story and the characters for us.

Hosea was a prophet who was called by God to take a wife, Gomer.

Gomer was a prostitute.

And of course, this was to demonstrate the nature of the relationship that the nation of Israel had with God from God's perspective.

So, as the story plays out, Hosea is playing the role of God as the good father, the good husband.

Gomer is playing the part of the unfaithful nation of Israel, who is prostituting themselves out to other gods.

So Hosea marries Gomer, which is a picture of salvation.

We become the bride of Christ when we're saved.

Hosea takes Gomer as his wife and has several children with them.

Things are going well for a couple of years.

But then Gomer starts pining for her old life in the old ways.

So she takes off to chase her lovers, leaving her husband.

And I want to start reading in chapter 2.

Actually, guys, you can take those down because I'm not even there yet.

I wanted to read them out of the Bible because there's a lot of them.

Hosea 2, I'm going to start reading in verse 5.

Make sure I'm in the right book.

So the prophet writes, chapter 2, verse 5,

For their mother has played the harlot.

She who conceived them has behaved shamefully.

For she said, I will go after my lovers who gave me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.

Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns and wall her in so that she cannot find her paths.

She will chase her lovers but not overtake them.

Yes, she will seek them but not find them.

Jump down to verse 9.

God is still speaking about Gomer.

He says, "...therefore I will return and take away my grain in its time, my new wine in its season.

I will take back my wool and my linen, given to cover her nakedness.

Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall deliver her from my hand."

I will also cause her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, her Sabbath, all of her appointed feasts.

And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, these are my wages that my lovers have given me.

So I will make them a forest and the beast of the field shall eat them.

I will punish her for the days of the bales to which she burned incense.

She decked herself with earrings and jewelry and went after her lovers.

But me, she forgot, says the Lord.

Now this is an extreme example.

Someone who totally abandoned her faith and went after these things.

But this is also a picture of pain.

This is a picture of scourging.

Where God may not be physically whipping us.

God wasn't down there beating Gomer.

But what he was doing was removing the protections that he had given her.

Every place she went, there was trouble.

Every time she went to get grain, it was gone.

Every time she went to the wine, it wasn't there.

Every time she needed to go somewhere, it was a difficult path.

There was just trouble everywhere.

No matter where she turned, everything was fighting her.

She couldn't make it to the one she thought would give her safety.

She couldn't make it to what she needed to live for.

Because God was reminding her that all of that comes from me.

And if you're going to seek it from someone else, good luck.

And again, remember, God doesn't hate Gomer.

There's a lot of pain in Gomer's life.

It even says in verse 5, I will hedge up her way with thorns.

And I'm not talking about blackberry bushes.

That's a thorn.

That's a hedge.

Would you like to walk through that?

Think about it.

If you think about the passage, she doesn't even have clothes enough to cover her nakedness, but yet she's trying to press through.

That's what it's like when we choose to walk away from God and chase things in life instead of God.

And guess what?

Typically, it's God who's making the hedge.

Because he hates you, right?

He just wants to take all the fun out of life.

He doesn't want to give me any good things.

He just wants to see me suffer.

That's the God I serve.

It might be the God you serve, but it's not the one I serve.

But with all this that we have read, it's a tempered response from God.

It's a tempered response from God.

It's not out of anger.

It's not out of hate.

It's tempered.

So let's read.

I want to just highlight this one more time.

Because the pain has a goal.

We're going to go back a slide, guys.

Hosea 2, verse 7 and 8 says, She will chase her lovers, but not overtake them.

Yes, she will seek them, but not find them.

She will say, I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better then than now.

The purpose for the thorns is to make you and I think, man,

It was definitely better when I was following God than it is today.

For she did not know that I gave her grain and new wine and oil and multiplied her gold and silver.

See, anytime that we chase something that leads us away from God, He's going to put thorns in our path.

And He's trying to bring us back to Him.

He doesn't want to punish us.

He wants to remind us that there was a better time in life.

There was a time when there was food and there was wine and there was oil and there was money.

But it's when I was following and looking after Jesus, not when I was going every other way available.

I have a cousin who was raised in church.

He knew the Bible, but he willingly walked contrary to God.

And I remember him as a kid.

I hated being around him.

He was an extremely vulgar guy.

Very ungodly.

I mean, just didn't like being around this guy.

And he lived a life that highlights this passage of Scripture.

So, as you know, I grew up in Louisiana.

All of my family lives there.

Louisiana has a lot of problems, but tornadoes are not one of them.

We have hurricanes and we have all kinds of things.

Well, my cousin was at his house in a trailer park.

He had some other family members there.

A tornado strikes dead center of this trailer park, hits his trailer.

That in and of itself could be like, hmm, well, Lord, I don't know.

It was a wild thing.

This is all something like 24, 25 years ago, something like that.

Very interesting thing.

One of my other cousins who was there died in this tornado.

It was a dead strike on the trailer.

The trailer was obliterated.

One of my cousins died in the aftermath.

But the cousin I'm speaking of here

was sucked out of his trailer, picked up into the tornado.

True story, 100%.

He was dropped a quarter of a mile from his house in a field.

Happened to land close to a ditch, was able to crawl into the ditch to wait out the storm.

It all passed.

They ended up finding him.

Hurt his leg really bad.

Had to get his leg amputated.

It actually was so bad.

But he tells this story.

He's sitting in the ditch.

trying to figure out what's going on.

And he says, I hear this voice.

Do I have your attention now?

He said, there wasn't nobody with me.

But he said, I heard God say, do I have your attention?

And I don't know how God does these things, but he tells the story, and I don't have the exact quote, but he tells the story of how in his mind he was replayed God whispering to him.

God talking to him, God gesturing loudly to him, God hollering at him, until they came to the point where he said, God was screaming at me to get my attention.

He said, it took me losing my leg, being flung by a tornado, to finally be able to say, oh, God's trying to get my attention.

There was a lot of pain in my cousin's life.

And it took that for him to finally stop pushing into the wall of thorns to be able to say, man, this is not worth the trouble.

See, he's

Sometimes when pain comes to our life, it's not all punishment.

Sometimes it's to get our attention.

And if you're not willing to listen to God when he taps you on the shoulder, if you're not willing to listen to God when he's saying, hey, hey, over here, if you're not willing to listen to him, all the ways that he tries to get in touch with you

he will escalate his attempts.

Because all pain in this life, if it brings us back to the saving knowledge of Jesus, is worth it.

Jesus even said as much in the Gospels, if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.

Better to enter heaven maimed

than to go to hell seeing great.

All pain in this side of life is worth it if it brings us back to seeing and knowing God for who He is.

From God's perspective, there is no pain not worth it to turn us back to our first love, to our Savior, to the one who loves us so much He came willingly and suffered the cross, endured the shame, the hostility, for the joy that was set before Him so that you and I might know Him

that joy is fulfilled by you and I being obedient to God.

In closing this morning, I wonder if there are some here who might be experiencing the discipline of God.

Hopefully it's just at the rebuking stage where he's calling out.

He's like, hey, pay attention.

Pay attention.

Think about it.

Examine your life.

Examine your heart.

Examine your motives.

Are you walking contrary to me?

Are you starting to veer a little bit to the left?

Are you getting distracted by things over here on the right?

Is God saying, hey, pay attention.

Better to listen when He's speaking.

Because it escalates to scourging.

Maybe you've gone far afield and the illustration of the thorns is a very real illustration to you.

You feel like in every area of your life it's nothing but pain, it's nothing but trouble, it's nothing but loss, it's nothing but

Maybe it's God trying to get your attention.

Saying stop chasing the world.

It can't provide for you what you're looking for.

There's a hole in your heart that's filled by one thing and it's Jesus Christ.

All else gives death.

Have you wandered away from God maybe?

There's no happiness.

There's no celebrations.

It's just all struggle.

Listen.

Be like Gomer and say, you know what?

It was better for me.

Take stock of where you are.

Think back to where you were with God.

Decide which is a better option.

I promise, in every case, with Jesus is the better option.

It doesn't mean it's easy street.

It doesn't mean that everything's provided.

It doesn't mean that it's all going to be roses and petunias from now until you die.

No.

Life is life.

But life with Jesus is so much sweeter than life without.

Hmm.

I feel like this is a timely word this morning because Easter's in two weeks.

There's going to be a lot of people here who don't know Jesus.

There's going to be a lot of people visiting church because, well, Mom and Dad go, so I have to go on Easter.

But I feel like the message this morning is, is your house in order?

Are you following Jesus enough to be a light to someone who's lost in the darkness?

Or are you lost yourself?

Lost people can't bring lost people to Jesus.

It's the blind leading the blind.

And Jesus says they'll both fall in the ditch.

So this morning I believe the message is, is your house in order?

Are you following Jesus?

And if you're not, are you experiencing his discipline to get you back?

Stand with me this morning.

I agonized over this sermon this morning, and I'll be honest with you, I had no desire to give it.

I sat and worshipped this morning, praying, Lord, if there's something else, I will go with it.

But I believe in the day and age which we live.

The enemy is working double time to give us a distraction.

He wants us involved in politics.

He wants us involved in all the identity stuff.

He wants us involved in all of these things.

But the last thing he wants us doing is focusing on Jesus.

Anything else is fine with him.

But the moment we turn our attention to Jesus, he knows he's in trouble.

Father, I'll be honest, Lord, this was a hard message this morning.

The implications are heavy.

Because I know as I studied this word and as I wrote this sermon...

All the instances where I have wandered and been distracted came to mind.

And Father, I don't know why it is that we, like Gomer, will often double down and continue to push, thinking, boy, if I can just get through, it'll be better.

But truth is, the further we get from you,

the thicker the hedges get.

But what I love about the story in Hosea, if you continue to read down, if you continue to read chapter 2, there's a verse around verse 14, 15, or 16 that says,

That you will call out to her and you will allure her and you will bring her back to you.

And that you will open a door of hope in the midst of the valley of Achor.

The valley of trouble.

What is so amazing about you, God, even though you hedge up our way with thorns, the moment you

We come to the realization that it was better with you.

It says that you open a door of hope in the midst of the trouble we're in.

And you come so beautifully back to our saving.

You come back to us to forgive us.

To like the verses in Job where you apply bandages

You put the balm to heal the wounds.

You speak words of comfort to us.

Because the whole purpose of the discipline was to bring us back to You.

So Lord, for those of us who might be walking through some dark valleys, some thick hedges at the moment, give us moments to pause and to ponder, was it better before with Jesus or am I better off now

Because the moment we turn back to you and say, Father, forgive me.

There's no distance too great that you are not there immediately.

So Father, bring us back to you.

To walk with you.

To have our focus upon you.

Because it's so important today.

Because there are so many people who are lost and dying in the world that need us to be witnesses to them.

Father, I pray that you would give us the strength to do that.

As Easter approaches, God, that we would continue speaking your name, speaking of you, bringing and inviting people to church, because it is not my speaking, but it is the words of life that bring repentance and forgiveness to the heart.

Let us be about your business.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Well, Lord bless you guys.

Tuesday is Alpha, and we will see you next week.