

True Sons of the Father

Heb 12. 1-15

Steve is an engineer from Idaho. And Steve wants to win the \$50000. He's prepared to do what he has to do. All he has to do is run down the ramp, over the obstacles and keep out of the water. Then he has to cross the punching wall and keep out of the mud. Then Steve goes up the ramp to leap over the big balls.

And swing across the chasm. And if he can do all that..... if he can do all that.. faster than the others. Steve's through the QUALIFIER..... to the NEXT ROUND..... of TOTAL WIPEOUT.

A bit closer to home. Dave is a diesel fitter from Adelaide. And he's on Australian Gladiator. He's got to run the GAUNTLET. Which is a pathway lined with Gladiators like THUNDER and SCAR who are armed with padded shields.

And as one of the challenges.....he's got to get past them. To win the prize.

Now I don't know if you're familiar with either Total Wipeout or Gladiator.

But they're basically TV gameshows where the contestants need to get past obstacles toto get the prize at the end.

You run the gauntlet. You dodge the obstacles. Because there's a prize for the winner.

And in a way. The writer of Hebrews in chapter 11 we saw it two weeks ago.

Pointed us to a whole heap of heroes of the faith. Who were looking forward to

that reward. Who faced all kinds of things. But endured because of that reward God had promised.

Not least Jesus, who according to verse 2 of chapter 12. Who for the joy set before HIM endured the cross.

Now the point of the TV shows is entertainment. The point of the examples of chapter 11 is for our encouragement.

Since we're surrounded by such a great mob of witnesses the writer says. Let's throw off whatever it might be that could disqualify us.

But we're just hitting a slightly different tack here. The point is still encouragement. Endurance is the word that comes up here. But the point is. The troubles along the way..... are more than just barriers to the goal at the end. There's more to it than that. Have a look with me at verse 7 and you'll see what I mean. Verse 7. You see he says.

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons.

See there's two things here. Not only is it worth sticking with Jesus because of the heavenly reward.

He's saying. Number one. The hard yards. The hard yakka itself. Those trials you endure along the way. Are actually working for you. And producing good. That's the first thing.

The second thing is. In themselves they're evidence. They demonstrate God's love for you. More than that. His deep relational commitment to you.

Now let me just say up front. I THINK. This is one of the most difficult things to come to grips with. That the bible teaches.

This is also probably the number one area – people attack the Christian faith...

And in the end. If you can wrestle with it and come to grips with it. I think it may well be one of the strongest strengths of Christianity. But you can understand why people ask the question.

I mean - How is it that a sovereign God allows bad things, troubles? And more than that. Sometimes horrific things. How can he allow them in the first place? Or condone them. Or even ordain them. Or orchestrate them. How can he do that and still be good? How on earth can any good come out of a parent accidentally running over their little child in their car? How can any good come out of a heart attack at the age of 40? Or a debilitating disease.and you can add your own example I'm sure.

You read the Psalms. They're full of the question why.

Their difficult questions. It's difficult to work it out logically. And even if you can somehow come to grips with it in your head. That's not enough. You have to be convinced. You have to believe it. And not just in theory. But in reality.

So please don't hear anything I say this morning as being glib, or trite.

And if you're right in the middle of something really difficult. It's probably even harder for you. In a way. This kind of stuff is really what you need to wrestle with when you're **not** right in the middle of something hard.

Now the issue here. You pick it up there at the end of verse 3. It's knowledge, it's a reminder of what God's doing, so you're not deflated by hardship.

You see he says. Consider him, that is Jesus. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

I mean, I can understand why people would grow weary. I can understand why people feel like their bubble's been burst in the face of hardship.

I mean, sure there's a reward at the end. But even so. You can understand the why questions. What's the point of all this? Is it really necessary? Especially given God's claims to be a loving God, a powerful sovereign God.

Jon Eareckson Tada is the classic example of this . You might have heard of Joni. Joni's an American who dived into water at the age of 17. She broke her neck and became a quadriplegic. And still is.

So this is way more than THEORY for her. And the question is. What possible good. Can this be? And what does it say about God? And as the question marks rise up..... you can see how easy it might be to lose heart. To grow weary.

Is God good, but just not powerful enough to deal with these things....is that it?

Is he just off with the pixies. Unaware of it.....is that it? Like the mum who's unaware her teenage child's being molested by her boyfriend.

Is he just not strong enough. Or not aware enough..

Worse. Is he NOT GOOD AT ALL?

They're the questions that race through your mind.

Not if you're a Buddhist. Because whatever happens is just Karma.

And not if you're an atheist. Because whatever happens is random chance. Tuff luck.

Not even if you're a Muslim. Because Allah doesn't claim to be working anything in particular in them. You just accept it and move on.

But the God of the Bible - claims to be positively working out his good purposes.

Which is what we read there in verse 7. And so the questions arise.

But it says here. It says. God's doing something. No. Endure hardship as discipline.

He's not absent. Endure hardship as discipline. He's not out of control. He's demonstrating his loving Fatherly role.

Let's just follow the logic from verse 4.

Remember we've got the heroes of the faith in the background. Who were brutalized and mistreated. And Jesus himself. That's the immediate context.

And he says. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Which might well be the case for you. It certainly is for me.

Just a little reality check. It's easy to talk in the abstract about others. Take the worst case scenario. But let's just bring it home. If you haven't shed your blood.

But even so. Here's a word from the Old Testament scriptures. That you've forgotten. Remember he's talking to the Hebrews.

From Proverbs 3.

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.

Now, if they've forgotten that. It doesn't take much to imagine what they were thinking about their troubles.

Let's talk hypothetically. Let's say one of my children says to me. They say. I know why you don't let me do whatever I want. And you say why? And they say. It's because you don't love me.

And you're a bit shocked. But that's how our minds tend to picture it. When things don't go the way I'd like. That means. God's mean. That means....God doesn't love me. Or some other derivatives. God's weak. He doesn't see.

And you might say....well Christians don't think that way. But they do. Which is why this is here in the letter.

You've forgotten. Not only the proverb. But the whole way the parent child relationship works.

The mum and dad's responsibility. Because they're more committed to their child than anyone else. Is to discipline.

Discipline. And I'm taking the word in a broad sense. Discipline of training, shaping, guiding, teaching, rebuking, restraining, limiting. As well as encouragement. All those things.

It's an act of love. You might call it tough love. But it's something that happens. As a result of the strongest bond of love that exists.

So don't lose heart.

God's not mean or inept. He's treating you as Sons and daughters.

For what son is not disciplined by his father?

It's a rhetorical question. You're saying God's not good because of the hardships of life.

Maybe you're confused because you think Jesus' death means sickness and disease and the troubles of the sinful world should be behind us. But they're not.

Either way. You lose heart.

But what if..... God loves you so much. That he doesn't want you to grow up to be a spoilt brat?

What if God loves you like one of his kids. And the things that are dished up to your plate like the veges you didn't want to eat when you were a little kid. What if in God's greater wisdom they're good for you?

God's training. God's restraining. God's limiting. Even punishing. Shows his acceptance of you as a son. It doesn't disprove it. That's how life works. It's the grandparents who spoil the kids isn't it? The stepdad is the one less likely to discipline. If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

Now, it takes a certain amount of maturity to swallow that pill.

Son, this is for your own good.

But verse 9 - if that's what dad's do. And we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!

Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.

Now you might say. I'd rather stay unholy thanks if it's all the same. I mean is that really a good that's worth the trouble? Even if it's NOT blood shedding trouble.

You might not agree that it's worth whatever the cost is for you.

But your attitude is really important. Because depending on your attitude. You'll either come out better. Or you'll come out bitter with no wind left in your sails.

You'll either be strengthened in your faith. Or you'll be crippled. And weak in faith.

God disciplines us for our Good. You need to lock that one down and play it over and over and over and over in your head. So when the hard times come. You'll be ready.

It's like that Father-Son/Parent-child relationship experience we know.

And v 11, something else we know

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. That's how it is.

I don't expect my kids to say – thanks for banning me from the TV dad. I really appreciate it and I know it's making me a better person.

Get real. I don't expect that.

Discipline is painful. At the time.

It's painful for the parent too. Have you thought about it from that angle.

If it's painful for you to hear horror stories of children being molested. Car accidents. Cancer. All the horrors of what we do to each other.

How much harder must it be for God. Who sees more than just the news reel highlights. Who knows every evil done in private. Every person on the cancer ward. Every hardship for every person. And who has the power.....Who could hold all that back. But doesn't. Because he's committed to our good.

I remember having to hold Liam down on the operating table. He had to have an eye operation at age 4. I had to hold him down while they forced the mask on his

face and he convulsed on the table in front of me. Absolutely confused about what was happening to him. It was awful.

It's awful when my kids throw themselves in a fit on the floor and they're crying bitterly because they've done the wrong thing and there's a consequence.

I don't like to see them like that.

But I'm the parent. And I do my best. Because they're MY KIDS. And my commitment to them goes way beyond chocolate bars and ice-cream. Because I care about them.

Now as far as I understand. Kids still don't come with an instruction book. And you just do the best you can. But God's a bit better daddy than me. He's not just a father. HE's the father. And he really knows what he's doing.

Hebrews 12:10 ⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.

Now....if that's true – you can see how that's got to change your attitude about things. I heard someone say once. God doesn't just send any old trial. He sends tailor made trials.

This is what Joni Tada says in her book. When God Weeps:

“God's plan is specific. He doesn't say. “Into each life a little rain must fall,” then aim a hose in earth's general direction and see who gets the wettest. He doesn't reach for a key, wind up nature with its sunny days and hurricanes, then sit back and watch the show. He doesn't let Satan prowl about totally unrestricted. He

doesn't believe in a hands-off policy of governing. He's not our planet's absent landlord. Rather, he screens the trials that come to each of us—allowing only those that accomplish his good plan, because he takes no joy in human agony. These trials aren't evenly distributed from person to person. This can discourage us, for we are not privy to his reasons. But in God's wisdom and love, every trial in a Christian's life is ordained from eternity past, custom made for that believer's eternal good, even when it doesn't seem like it. Nothing happens by accident...not even tragedy....not even sins committed against us.

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.

Now, the topic of suffering you could spend a huge amount of time on it.

But the writer to the Hebrews is saying this.

In light of the one who endured such opposition from sinful men.

In light of the loving God's demonstrated commitment to your good.

Because that's where it all comes back to.

In light of God's power demonstrated at the cross.

In light of God's commitment to your good demonstrated at the cross.

In light of God's demonstrated ability to use awful, horrific, sinful events to bring about good at the cross.

You can take it that God is doing that in the things of your life.

That seem so hard. That make you jealous of others who seem to sail through without problems.

John Dickson 's written a book called If I were God I'd end all the pain. He says this.

I cannot always follow the hand of the Artist: some of his work just eludes me. But what the biblical narrative tells me- and in particular, the account of Christ's passion – is that while I may not be able to trace the Artist's hand at all times, I can always trust his motives. The God who is in control of all things, who acts behind the scenes in all things, is also the God who willingly suffers. He is the one I can shout at, cry with and find comfort in. His heart, if not all his ways, is clear to me because at the cross he wore it on his sleeve for all to see.

We're down at verse 12.

In light of that. Don't be crippled. Don't become bitter. Become better.

Therefore strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

I don't want to finish with some blunt statement about just accepting the words here. I don't think that's helpful. And I think this is the kind of thing I'll struggle with 'till I'm six feet under. Let me finish by asking a question. Let me just ask:

Could it be true? Could it be that God's not distant, or weak, or mean.

Could it be that in Christ. You've entered into that closest of all relationships between a Father and a son. And could it be that he loves you and disciplines you for your good as one of the kids he loves like that?

Can you accept that whatever it is you're facing. Or have faced, or WILL FACE in the future. Even if it did mean shedding your blood. can you accept that whatever it is, is somehow. In some way. Producing that harvest of righteousness. That you'll thank God for when you see things from his perspective?