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*When Hope Screams:  
Learning How to Suffer as Sons  
from the Book of Hebrews*

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**When Hope Screams**

My daughter, Hope, is precious, at least in my eyes. This utterly biased perspective is probably true of most fathers. There are times when my whole world stops and zeroes in on her toothy grin, or her cackling laugh. Especially when she is walking outside (she *loves* being outside) and turns to look at me with her hand outstretched for me to hold. Or when she scampers over to give me a hug when I walk through the door. Or when she lays her head on my shoulder when she is exhausted after a long day. When Hope laughs, smiles, or grins, life is good and all the world seems right.

But, when Hope screams, that whole world seems to come unhinged. Aside from having a spirited disposition, she is also quite capable of emptying her lungs and filling a room with piercing volume. After only a short while of this screeching intensity, she can work herself up to the point where the original cause of the situation becomes superfluous, as the act itself of being upset perpetuates the pain. Suddenly, my words no longer soothe her sobs, and she no longer finds rest in my arms. I remember one night in particular. Late into the evening, she woke up with a startling, desperate cry. We were visiting relatives, so for several hours, we attempted in vain to calm her trembling body back to sleep. Though she finally lay back down, we were never able to identify the cause of this particularly acute ordeal. Holding a screaming child who will not be pacified is an unnerving affair. In these sobering moments, I am forced to reckon with the fact that I am not capable of shielding her from the harsh realities of the fallen world into which she was born. I can do nothing to change the fact that the moment she took her first breath, countless others breathed their last.

Suffering is often as difficult to understand as it is to endure. The burden of sorrow and the weight of suffering are interwoven elements of our lives. Thus, grappling with the gravity of pain in a sin-riddled world is not an optional task. Tragedy, loss, and heartache often carry enough force to shake

even the strongest theological foundations. In the pursuit of faithfulness amidst pain, we are not helped by easy answers or superficial articulations of the questions. Though believers have sometimes encouraged one another by diminishing the horror of human pain, the claims of the gospel are more drastic than that. In Scripture, we hear a voice that speaks to the wounds of worst-case scenarios. Indeed, Christian hope is most needed when life screams.

In attempting to understand the nature of human pain, there are at least three types of suffering that a person might experience. First, someone might experience the just and natural consequences of his or her sin. Second, someone might experience undeserved persecution for faith in Christ. Or, third, someone might experience the effects of living in a fallen world. This last category involves suffering that often seems utterly meaningless. Though they have divergent origins, all three of these categories convey genuine hardship and represent a challenge to the thought process of a believer. Any Christian response to the problem of pain must be able to account for at least these broad areas. How should we respond to the myriad of situations that involuntarily bring forth from the depths of who we are the wrenching query, “Where now is my hope?” (Job 17:15).<sup>1</sup>

### When Hope Screamed

Hope in the New Testament is often connected to the resurrection and the life that is found as a result of being “in Christ.”<sup>2</sup> This hope is not simply a vague and wishful longing for a better future, but rather is rooted in the certainty of God’s character and his plan of redemption.<sup>3</sup> Just as Christian hope is only found *in Him*, in a real sense, it ultimately *is Him*. Hope at the most profound level is not an abstract concept but a living person.<sup>4</sup> In the Old

<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise noted all Scripture references are from the Holy Bible, New American Standard Bible (NASB).

<sup>2</sup>For instance, see Acts 23:6; 26:6; Rom 4: 18; 4:2; 12:12; 15:4; 15:13; 2 Cor 1:10; Col 1:5; 1 Thess 1:3; 4:13; 2 Thess 2:16; Titus 2:13; 1 Pet 1:3. For an overview of the concept of hope in Paul’s letters, see J. M. Everts, “Hope,” in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, ed. Gerald Hawthorne and Ralph Martin (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 415–17. Everts notes that “every statement Paul makes about Christian hope is also a statement about what God has given the believer in Christ.” Though the writer of Hebrews does not use the “in him” language in the same way that Paul does, he nevertheless emphasizes the importance of being identified with Christ. For instance, he describes Jesus as one who is “able also to save forever those who draw near to God *through Him*, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (7:25). The idea of being “in Him” is closely related to the notion of “considering Him” that is prevalent in Hebrews.

<sup>3</sup>Brad Eastman, “Hope,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, ed. Ralph Martin and Peter Davids (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), 499, argues that “the meaning of ‘hope’ and its cognates in the NT is radically different from that of the English word *hope*. Rather than expressing the desire for a particular outcome that is uncertain, hope in the NT by definition is characterized by certainty.” Cf. the important definition of faith found in Heb 11:1.

<sup>4</sup>S.H. Travis, “Hope,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair Ferguson and David

Testament, the notion of hope is closely associated with the Lord Himself. Yahweh is the “Hope of Israel” (Jer 14:8; 17:13; 50:7), and the foundation of the worship of God’s people is the hope found only in the Lord.<sup>5</sup> In his letters to the churches, Paul makes a similar identification. In Colossians 1:27, he explains that “God willed to make known” to His saints “the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” As he begins his first letter to Timothy, Paul makes this equation in simple and startling terms. He asserts that he is an “apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope” (1 Tim 1:1). The highest hope of a believer is Jesus Himself. Thus, holding on to hope involves clinging to the promises and person of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus is our Hope, and one day Hope screamed. The fact that Jesus suffered throughout His life is not something that we tend to think about or dwell upon. Our tradition sometimes even intentionally obscures this element of Jesus’ humanity. The passion of Jesus begins at His birth. The “little Lord Jesus” did in fact lay down “His sweet head” away in a Bethlehem manger, but the “little Lord Jesus” who “no crying He makes” is a Jesus who never existed. Rather, Jesus drew His first breath among a people who would ultimately put Him to death. As John says in the prologue to his Gospel, Jesus is one who came to His own, and his own did not receive Him (John 1:11). As a small child, Jesus fled from forces that sought to murder Him, and years later He stood before a court of His kinsmen who handed Him over to a Roman ruler on trumped up charges of treason. He grew in “wisdom and stature” (Luke 2:52) and into a “man of sorrows,” who was “well acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3). As He tells his disciples at key points in His ministry, the “Son of Man is going to suffer” (Matt 17:12).

Throughout the Gospel narratives, Jesus experiences and speaks about His own suffering. As the Gospels progress, they move steadily toward the consummation of Jesus’ suffering in Jerusalem. Luke in particular highlights

Wright, (Downers Grover: IVP, 1988), 321, observes that the concept of hope “can define either the *object* of hope, namely Christ and all that his final coming implies, or the *attitude* of hoping.” These two senses of hope are complementary, as “the ground of hope is God’s past activity in Jesus Christ, who points the way to God’s purposes for his creation.”

<sup>5</sup>In the book of Psalms, the theme of hope is closely related to the fact that the Lord is faithful and worthy of worship. To give one example, Ps 31:23–24 states, “O Love the Lord, all you His godly ones! The Lord preserves the faithful and fully recompenses the proud doer. Be strong and let your heart take courage, all you who hope in the Lord.” See also, 33:18, 38:15, 39:7, 42:5, 71:5, etc. In a number of other places in the Old Testament, the theme of hope is prominent. For example, both the absence and presence of hope are mentioned often in the book of Job (e.g., Job 7:6, 11:18, 13:15, 17:15, etc.). Cf. Lam 3:21–22.

<sup>6</sup>Along these lines, Nancy Guthrie, *Be Still, My Soul: Embracing God’s Purpose & Provision in Suffering* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 11, writes of her own experience with suffering, “Holding on to hope, for us, has not been a vague, sentimental experience. . . . I am not holding on to hope in terms of a positive perspective about the future or an innate sense of optimism, but rather holding on to the living person of Jesus Christ. I am grabbing hold of the promises of God, his purposes, and his provision, and refusing to let go.”

the high cost of this journey toward the cross. On the mount of transfiguration, Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus about “His departure which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). Soon after this, Luke records that “when the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). Until they get there, Luke takes pains to chart the progress of this journey, as discipleship takes place “on the way.” As they press forward, the disciples frequently fail to understand that Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem for the purpose of humiliation rather than exaltation. Jesus warns them that “the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected . . . and be killed and be raised up on the third day” (Luke 9:22). Later, He gravely states, “Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men” (Luke 9:44).<sup>7</sup> Luke makes it crystal clear that as Jesus heads to Jerusalem, He heads also to the cross.<sup>8</sup>

As this final journey ends, the humiliation of Jesus’ incarnation reaches an apex on a hill outside the city.<sup>9</sup> There the “King of the Jews” replaces the crown He had lain aside in Bethlehem with one made of thorns. Though severe and horrifying, the physical suffering of Jesus was only one element of His passion. The biblical writers take care to emphasize also that Jesus was bearing the full wrath of a holy God. Through His work on the cross, Jesus redeems a rebellious people and fulfills the purpose for which He came, to “save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). These physical and spiritual elements converge on the cross, as Jesus accomplishes His ultimate mission on earth. All of the Gospel writers note the meaning and intensity of these final moments of Jesus’ crucifixion. Mark records that “Jesus uttered a loud

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Jesus’ similar statements in Luke 18:31. In His teaching, Jesus also urges His disciples to remember that they too must share this experience of their master. These are footsteps that they must walk in as well (e.g., Luke 14:26–27). As He walks with two disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection, Jesus reiterates this theme by asking, “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” (Luke 24:26). Jesus had to suffer, and His disciples must follow Him even in this. A forceful illustration of this notion is Luke’s record of Simon of Cyrene carrying Jesus’ cross behind Him on the road to Calvary (Luke 23:26). Richard N. Longenecker, “Taking up the Cross Daily: Luke-Acts,” in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 70, notes that “for Luke, Simon of Cyrene . . . symbolized the attitude of Christian discipleship, carrying the symbol of Jesus’ suffering.” See also Jesus’ statements to Paul in Acts 9:16: “I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

<sup>8</sup>In Luke, being a disciple means following Jesus as He journeys toward Jerusalem and the cross. In Acts, being a disciple involves journeying *from* Jerusalem by the power of the Holy Spirit in light of the cross. Luke takes pains to show that Jesus and his disciples journeyed “on the way” in His Gospel, and in Acts, He describes the message of Christianity *as* the Way (e.g., Acts 9:2, 19:9, 19:23, 22:4, 24:14, 24:22). In both books, the work of Christ on the cross is central to the meaning of discipleship. As they journey to Jerusalem, the cross is the goal. As they journey away from Jerusalem it is the foundation of discipleship. The cross is thus both the cost of and the catalyst for discipleship. It is the cost, because disciples of Christ must pick up their cross daily and follow in His suffering. It is the catalyst, because the work of Christ on the cross enables and empowers His disciples to carry out His will.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Heb 13:12: “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.” The writer urges his readers to identify with this element of Jesus’ life by going “out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.”

cry, and breathed His last” (Mark 15:37).<sup>10</sup> His last words were loud and agonized. His final breath was a scream.

### Learning How to Suffer as Sons

How can seeing the connection between our pain and the life and work of Christ equip us to suffer well? One way might be to fill out what it means to be one of God’s children. Being an adopted child of God has implications for the manner in which you suffer. According to the writer of Hebrews, part of learning how to suffer as a son or daughter of the King means enduring hardship as “discipline.”

What is the discipline of the Lord? What do you normally think of when you hear that phrase, and how does “the discipline of the Lord” relate to suffering? Relating suffering to the concept of discipline might at first seem foolish or absurd. But, could this understanding of the discipline of the Lord be based on the wisdom of the Word? In Hebrews 12:1–13, the writer grapples with just this issue.<sup>11</sup> Carefully reflecting on this passage can help us answer the questions, What exactly *is* the discipline of the Lord, and do faithful believers experience it?

The book of Hebrews is a written sermon to a church of believers who were undergoing persecution and the temptation to waver in their faith.<sup>12</sup> They were a people experiencing spiritual exhaustion from external and

<sup>10</sup>The parallel Gospel accounts depict a similar scene. Matthew recounts, “Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit” (Matt 27:50). Luke notes that “Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit’” (Luke 23:46). John notes with finality that Jesus, “knowing that all things had already been accomplished to fulfill the Scripture,” said, “It is finished!” (John 19:30).

<sup>11</sup>N.C. Croy, *Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12.1–13 in its Rhetorical, Religious, and Philosophical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5, notes that in its synthesis and development of the themes of sonship, suffering, and perseverance, this paragraph unit expresses “supremely the letter’s paraenetic aim: to reinvigorate the flagging faith of the readers.” Croy observes that “this text is admittedly not among the most celebrated passages of the epistle.” He points out the dearth of “topical monographs or essays” on Heb 12:1–13, but nevertheless maintains that “one should not think that this passage is inconsequential, a sort of epistolary backwater.” Croy’s monograph is one of the only extended studies of this passage in print. Most commentators following him take his work on this subject into account.

<sup>12</sup>Though the general consensus among scholars has been to leave the question of authorship and audience undecided, it can nevertheless be said with some confidence that the writer of Hebrews was a prominent leader among the churches, a competent exegete exceedingly familiar with the Greek septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible (LXX), and a skilled literary and rhetorical craftsman. Cf. Radu Gheorghita’s comment on the exegetical competence of the author in *The Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 1: “The Author’s scriptural repertoire includes numerous quotations from the Old Testament, extensive use of OT language and ideas, references to the OT’s important cultic institutions, events and persons, and a variety of OT summaries, parallels, allusions, and echoes of scriptural texts.” The writer also seems to be fairly well acquainted with the congregation to whom he writes. For instance, he addresses the readers in intimate terms as “brothers” and characterizes Timothy as “our brother” (13:22–23).

internal factors.<sup>13</sup> Hebrews addresses this issue directly and equips them to press on by reminding them of important truths about *who they were* and *who had saved them*. If you are a believer experiencing spiritual exhaustion from external and internal factors and grappling with how to understand your pain in light of what you believe about the gospel, then there is a word here about who *you* are and who has saved *you*.

The author begins chapter twelve by encouraging his readers to “lay aside” the sin that so easily entangles them and to run with endurance the race that is set before them (12:1–2). The word picture of running a race stretches throughout this chapter. Running this race requires all the energy of the runner. It requires concentration, training, and endurance. This goal is achieved by looking to Jesus who is the “author and perfecter of faith.” Jesus has endured the cross and despised its shame “for the joy set before Him.” Alluding to Psalm 110:1, the writer says that Jesus then “sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”<sup>14</sup> These first two verses of chapter twelve are the climax of a long string of a “great cloud of witnesses” in chapter eleven, who endured various trials “by faith.”<sup>15</sup> After this striking and stunning description of Jesus as one who has accomplished the perfect work of redemption on the cross, the writer applies this example specifically to his readers and their situation.

### Consider Him Who Has Endured

We could say that this passage makes two main points or gives two primary exhortations for us to follow.<sup>16</sup> In the first command, the writer urges his readers to “consider Him who has endured such hostilities by sinners against Himself so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (12:3). The verb “consider” carries the notion of reflective reason and careful consideration of the person or object under scrutiny.<sup>17</sup> Most likely the word includes

<sup>13</sup>The addressees were most likely second-generation believers that were undergoing persecution and the temptation to fail to press on to maturity in their faith. For a survey of these issues, see Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 9–13. That there was threat of persecution is apparent from 10:32 (former persecution) and 13:2 (present imprisonment). Cf. William L. Lane, “Hebrews,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, ed. Ralph Martin and Peter Davids (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 443: “The intended audience was almost certainly the members of a house church with a history of fidelity to Christ.”

<sup>14</sup>Ps 110 is one of the most quoted Psalms in the New Testament and is particularly important in the book of Hebrews as a whole. David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 84, argues that “a good case can be made for understanding Ps 110:1, 4 as the key text that the author interpreted in the epistle.”

<sup>15</sup>Note the pervasive πίστει (“by faith”) language of Heb 11 (11:3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31). This clearly established theme in the immediately preceding context informs the urgent exhortations of Heb 12.

<sup>16</sup>The first is in v. 3, and the second comes in v. 7. “Consider” and “endure” are the only two imperatives in this passage and are thus the two most prominent verbal ideas in the immediate context.

<sup>17</sup>See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. and trans. William F. Arndt, F. Wilber Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker [BDAG], 3rd ed. (Chicago:

both the idea of “considering” as well as “making a comparison.” The “him” of this sentence is identified as “the one who has endured hostility.” This one surely refers to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, found in verse two. The command “heightens the appeal” that was sounded in the previous verses. We are now charged with considering the one whom we have fixed our eyes upon.<sup>18</sup> Rather than avoiding the thought of these painful moments, here we are asked to meditate upon them. The writer urges us *to pause* and consider the sufferings of Christ “point by point, going over them again and again, not the sufferings on the Cross only, but all that led up to it.”<sup>19</sup>

This stationary command is striking because he has just told us to run the race with endurance. He now urges us to *slow down* for just a minute and consider the fact that someone has gone before us. A good way to begin this reflection is to think about what Hebrews says elsewhere about Jesus. In the immediate context, these hostilities include the cross that Jesus “endured” and the shame that He despised.<sup>20</sup> This trial was brought about “by sinners” and “against Himself.”<sup>21</sup> In chapter 5, the writer characterizes the work of Jesus during “the days of His flesh,” by recounting that “He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death” (Heb 5:7).<sup>22</sup> Although Jesus was “a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered” (5:8). These words are essentially a summary

University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “ἀναλογίζομαι.” Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 251, observes that this word has mathematical implications of “reckoning” and “clearly implies a careful assessment.” Further, “the idea must be of considering each aspect of the hostility which Christ had to endure against him until a complete picture is obtained.” Cf. J. Harold Greenlee, *An Exegetical Summary of Hebrews* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1998), 510.

<sup>18</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 460.

<sup>19</sup>B.F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York: Macmillan, 1903), 399.

<sup>20</sup>The word ἀντιλογία (“hostilities”) is a broad term that can include the general idea of violent strife or dispute, but more specifically hostility or rebellion. See BDAG, s.v. “ἀντιλογία.” A form of ἀντιλογία occurs in Jude 1:11 with reference to the rebellion of Korah: “Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam’s error; they have been destroyed in Korah’s rebellion” (καὶ τῇ ἀντιλογίᾳ τοῦ Κόρε ἀπώλοντο). In the LXX this word refers to the rebellion (and lack of faith) of the people at the waters of Meribah in Num 20:13, 27:14, Deut 32:51, 33:8, Ps 81:7, and 106:32. Cf. Matthew Thiessen, “Hebrews 12.5–13, the Wilderness Period, and Israel’s Discipline,” *New Testament Studies* 55.3 (July 2009): 366–79. Thiessen argues that the writer understands the discipline of v. 5ff as a subtle allusion to the “discipline” of Israel during the wilderness wanderings.

<sup>21</sup>Allen, *Hebrews*, 576, observes that these phrases serve “to focus qualitatively on the intensity of the entire crucifixion event, including not only the physical suffering entailed, but also the concomitant opposition of all involved in the physical and spiritual realm.”

<sup>22</sup>Reflecting on Heb 5:7–8, Russell D. Moore, *Adopted For Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 52, writes, “Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane isn’t placidly staring, straight-backed with hands against a rock, into the sky as a shaft of light beams down on his face, as in so many of our paintings and church stained-glass window artistry. He is screaming to his Father for deliverance, to the point that the veins in his temples burst into drops of blood (Luke 22:39–44). That’s the *Abba* cry. It’s the scream of the crucified.” Cf. the previous discussion of the nature of Jesus’ incarnation.



of the previously mentioned Gospel narratives that recount Jesus' passion and crucifixion. The suffering community is tasked with considering a Savior who has already suffered on their behalf. Since He has suffered, He can come to the aid of those who suffer (see Heb 2:10–18). In 6:18–20, the suffering and work of Jesus are connected with the hope of believers. Because God is faithful to his promises, the writer reasons, “we who have taken refuge” have “strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us” (6:18). “This hope,” he says, is “an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us” (6:20). Because we are connected to this Redeemer who has suffered on our behalf, a “better hope” has been brought in “through which we draw near to God” (7:19). The work of Christ is thus the foundation of a believer's perseverance in belief in the midst of suffering.

The reason the writer gives for considering Christ in this manner is “so that” we might not grow weary and lose heart. These words reveal the purpose of considering Jesus. The phrases “grow weary” and “lose heart” carry the idea of physical fatigue and the process of becoming exhausted due to exertion. They indicate the wearying of a person's soul in running the race mentioned in verse 2. This danger involves growing weary of the whole task of running. There is a real possibility here of finally succumbing to fatigue.<sup>23</sup> The picture is of a slow drain of physical strength as the runner steadily wears down. The contest is depleting both the physical and mental resolve of the runners. The author's purpose in writing this section is to effect a *reversal* of this “down in the dumps” disposition. He hopes to prevent them from growing weary in their souls and losing their strength to press on to the finish line.<sup>24</sup> The antidote for this disease of fatigue is the thought of Christ and his sufferings. By setting the suffering of Christ before his readers, the writer urges, “*onward* Christian soldier, marching off to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before.”<sup>25</sup>

In response to this command, we might raise at least two objections. First, we might simply think that we have suffered too much. We might think that our struggle against sin, our laboring against those who would persecute us, or our battle against a faceless physical affliction is too taxing on our souls. We might be thinking of checking out of this excruciatingly long, no end in sight, not-what-I-signed-up-for marathon of hardship. There are just too many obstacles littering the path, and the striving is giving way to despairing. In response to these thoughts, the writer states boldly, “you have not yet

<sup>23</sup>Cf. BDAG, s.v. “κάμνω.” The perfective aspect of the subjunctive aorist verb κάμνητε indicates that the danger involves growing weary of the whole task of running. On perfective aspect, see later note 29.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 315. Noting that the readers have already “joyfully suffered the loss of their goods,” Calvin notes that they were in danger of “fainting half way in the contest.” For him, one of the reasons why the writer gives this exhortation is because “Christ will have no discharged soldiers.”

<sup>25</sup>Sabine Baring-Gould, “Onward Christian Soldiers.”

resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin” (12:4). The comparison with Christ now becomes a contrast.<sup>26</sup> The idea of shedding blood is probably an allusion to the suffering of Christ Himself and to the later martyrdom of believers. The readers have not experienced this level of persecution yet, though the writer wants to prepare them for it.<sup>27</sup>

This race being run involves striving against sin. The writer probably leaves the concept of “sin” general so that he can include its many forms.<sup>28</sup> This sin could thus involve any number of things, such as personal moral sin, or in light of the situation being addressed, it could also include a lack of faith in the midst of trials. Sin itself is seen as an adversary to be fought against. As in verse 1, all the things that hinder the runner are viewed as sin. Throwing off the trappings of sin is difficult, as they so easily entangle us (12:1). Serious striving is required to put them to death. This striving oftentimes comes alongside of genuine suffering in the life of a believer. In this situation, we are encouraged to look away from our own situation and to consider the situation of another. The writer intimates that only by looking *away* from yourself and *on* to Christ can you avoid growing weary and losing heart. So, this first statement is simply a reminder that unlike Christ, you have not yet resisted “to the point of shedding blood” in your “striving against sin.” He has done what you have not yet done. Your current struggle against sin has not yet resulted in your death and is still in progress.<sup>29</sup> Because you

<sup>26</sup>F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 340, notes that “the recipients of this epistle had not been called upon to endure anything like their Master’s suffering.”

<sup>27</sup>The idea of resisting to the point of shedding blood comes from the phrase μέγρις αἵματος. This phrase is generally associated with the termination of life and can include the notion of martyrdom. Their persecution has not yet included martyrdom (10:32–34) nor matched that of their Savior (12:1–2). The use of αἵματος here is a figurative extension of its primary sense of “blood,” entailing the “seat of life” (BDAG, s.v. “αἷμα”). This usage is an example of synecdoche, where a part of an entity stands for the whole (i.e., the blood represents the life of a person). Cf. Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 342n64, who notes that in extrabiblical parallels, the phrase is used of “mortal combat.” He regards the idea of martyrdom likely in light of 11:35–38. Contra C.R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 525.

<sup>28</sup>Wescott, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 400, observes that “the conflict of the Hebrews is spoken of as conflict with sin rather than sinners (v. 3), in order to emphasize its essential character . . . and to include its various forms.” The noun τὴν ἁμαρτίαν (“sin”) is likely being viewed collectively and thus includes a wide array of disobedient behavior. In this case, it could be a personification of sin “as an adversary” and might also refer to the “sin of unbelief.” For a survey of the interpretive options for this term, see Greenlee, *Exegetical Summary of Hebrews*, 513–14.

<sup>29</sup>The aorist tense of ἀντιλατέσθητε (“resisted”) at the beginning of the sentence contrasts with the present tense of ἀνταγωνιζόμενοι (“striving”) at the end of the clause. Their current struggle against sin has not yet resulted in their death and is still in progress. Consequently, it cannot yet be viewed as a whole. The aspect of these verbs confirms the significance of this contrast. The aorist tense is semantically coded with perfective aspect, which views the action as a whole, while the present tense conveys imperfective aspect which views the action as a close, continuous occurrence. For the significance of the aorist aspect, see Buist Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 86–

have not yet ceased living, you must not yet cease striving. In other words, if you are still breathing, God is not finished with you yet. In redirecting our thinking on this matter, the writer urges us onward once again. There is still another leg of this “race” up ahead that needs to be run.

The second thing you might think is that because you are suffering, then the Lord must not love you. You might be tempted to think that the hardship you are encountering is a result of God abandoning you in your time of deepest need. This line of thinking is countered in an abrupt and dramatic way in verses 5–6. The writer says, “You have forgotten the exhortation that is addressed to you as sons.” The word for “forgotten” here has a forceful sense of “to forget completely.”<sup>30</sup> They had completely forgotten an important exhortation that was meant specifically for them.<sup>31</sup> This type of exhortation involves encouragement as well as rebuke and is one that addresses them as sons.<sup>32</sup> This passage marks the first time in the book that the readers are addressed as children of God. In 2:10, the author mentions Christ “bringing many sons to glory,” but here he identifies them directly as sons. A major theme of Hebrews is that Jesus is *the* Son through whom God has spoken (1:1). So, that the writer intentionally identifies us as sons is no trivial characterization.<sup>33</sup> We can be called sons, because *the* Son has gone before us.

This forgotten address is one that is ongoing, contemporary, and relevant.<sup>34</sup> What makes this present tense idea important and surprising is that

98. Especially, 97: “The aorist presents an occurrence *in summary, viewed as a whole from the outside, without regard for the internal make-up of the occurrence.*” For an introductory treatment of an aspectual understanding of Greek tense, see chapter one of Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

<sup>30</sup>The word ἐκλήθησθε most likely has a forceful sense of “to forget completely.” This verb is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament, but its usage in extrabiblical literature points to a strong sense for the verb as something along the lines of “forget (altogether).” See BDAG, s.v. “ἐκλανθάνομαι.” Additionally, Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 646, suggests that the prefix εκ- here intensifies the force of the verb.

<sup>31</sup>Note that the “exhortation” (παρακλήσεως) is addressed “to you” (ὕμῖν).

<sup>32</sup>The phrase ὡς υἱοῖς (“as sons”) is what identifies the readers directly as sons. The noun παρακλήσεως here involves the idea of a strong word of exhortation. Compare how the author characterizes his work in Heb 13:22 as a word of exhortation (τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως). Similarly, in Acts 13:15, Paul’s interpretive discourse on a text from the Law and the Prophets is described as a λόγος παρακλήσεως. Thus, in 12:5–6, the author gives an exhortation within an exhortation, which he will then explain and expand. One might even view 12:3–11 as a sermon within a sermon.

<sup>33</sup>Günther Bornkamm, “Sohnschaft und Leiden,” in *Judentum, Urchristentum, Kirche: Festschrift für Joachim Jeremias*, ed. Walter Eltester (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), 198, fittingly characterizes the “thema” of 12:5ff as “Der Sohn und die Söhne.”

<sup>34</sup>This contemporaneity is conveyed by the present tense and middle voice of the verb διαλέγεται. This particular usage probably conveys the idea of instruction about something (BDAG, s.v. “διαλέγομαι”), but the verb also implies a communicative situation involving speech and direct discourse. So William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Word Books, 1991), 420. The subject of the verb is most likely the exhortation, which is drawn from the Scripture, which is the manner in which God “speaks” in the book

what follows is a quotation from the Old Testament. The writer is about to ask his readers to view their suffering as discipline from the Lord, and he draws his exegetical support for this bold exhortation from the wisdom of the Scriptures, in particular, Proverbs 3:11–12.<sup>35</sup> By quoting this passage from Proverbs, he applies the wisdom of the Lord to the situation of suffering. In their original context, these verses appear alongside commands to trust the Lord, fear the Lord, and honor the Lord, making this quotation intimately connected to those ideas.<sup>36</sup>

The manner in which the writer describes and introduces this quotation is also drawn from its Old Testament context. The shape of the book of Proverbs guides the reading of the individual proverbs that it contains, and the first nine chapters paint a picture of a father instructing his son in the ways of wisdom. This extended analogy provides the narrative framework for the rest of the book.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the structural context of the book of Proverbs implies that the kind of wisdom contained in the Proverbs is the kind that a godly father would pass along to his son. This feature of the quotation's context allows the writer of Hebrews to apply these words from Proverbs directly to his contemporary readers. The proverb can thus fittingly address us *today* as sons.

This forgotten “exhortation” in verses 5–6 reads, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by him. For those whom the Lord loves, he disciplines. And he scourges every son whom he receives.” These quoted words consist of a strong discouragement from neglecting the discipline of the Lord. Notice that the writer unambiguously designates the source of the discipline. This is no generic hardship or faceless rebuke. On the contrary, it is the discipline of the Lord. This word is directed in intimate terms to “my son.”<sup>38</sup> The singular use of “son” here is sandwiched

of Hebrews. See these options viewed separately in Greenlee, *Exegetical Summary of Hebrews*, 515. Cf. O'Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 463, who notes that the verbal idea here “underscores the relational dimensions, for in the utterance of the scriptural text God is in conversation with his children.”

<sup>35</sup>The text is virtually a verbatim quotation of the LXX translation of Prov 3:11–12, with one minor difference. The keywords of this quotation are son (υἱός), discipline (παιδεία), and Lord (κύριος). These words are particularly suited to the writer's purpose in Heb 12 and serve as the links in several of the semantic chains running through this chapter. A “semantic chain” is an instance of “the use of lexis in grouping,” and specifically an example of grouping “items from the same semantic domain.” See Cynthia L. Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship between Form and Meaning* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 47–50.

<sup>36</sup>These verses function as the “crowning exhortation” of a series of four exhortations in the larger unit of Prov 3:1–12. The first three directives are to “trust the Lord” (3:5), “fear the Lord” (3:7), and “honor the Lord” (3:7). See Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 986.

<sup>37</sup>For the rhetorical unity of chapters 1–9, see Glenn D. Pemberton, “The Rhetoric of the Father in Proverbs 1–9,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30.1 (2005): 63–82. Michael V. Fox calls this first major section the “hermeneutical preamble to the rest of the book” in “Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116.4 (Winter 1997): 613.

<sup>38</sup>The “preponderance of the textual variants” of both the LXX of Prov 3:11 and the

between the plural uses of “sons” in verse 5 and in verse 7. In his exposition of this proverb, the writer intentionally broadens the scope of this instruction. Thus, he demonstrates that this model of fatherly discipline applies to all of God’s children.<sup>39</sup>

The concept of discipline is crucial for understanding the content of this quotation and the purpose of this passage. The term itself is also one of the verbal elements that stitch the tapestry of this section together.<sup>40</sup> Though we usually only associate “discipline” with punishment, the concept is broader than that. The term can be defined as “the act of providing guidance for responsible living” and conveys the idea of both discipline as correction for disobedience and discipline as training in obedience.<sup>41</sup> The concept also combines the idea of teaching with the notion of active guidance. This is no bare instruction that is in view. Rather, the picture is of a father *giving* a word of instruction and also *guiding* the efforts of the son who carries it out. You can see this from the book of Proverbs itself. In Proverbs, discipline can entail correction (13:24, 23:12–14, 29:17), reproach (5:12, 15:32), and also

Hebrews text point to the addition of  $\mu\omicron\nu$  by the writer. See Gheorghita, *Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews*, 50. This addition adds to the intimacy of the address, and is also likely drawn from the context of the book of Proverbs, where the address “my son” is common (e.g., Prov 1:8, 10, 2:1, 3:1, etc.). Bornkamm, “Sohnschaft und Leiden,” 197, notes that this addition renders the scriptural quotation as an immediate address to the faithful as the very Word of God (Anrede unmittelbar als Gottes eigenes Wort an den Frommen).

<sup>39</sup>Ellingworth, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 648, labels  $\nu\acute{\iota}\acute{\epsilon}$  (“son”) as a “generic singular.” Thus, the term can broadly be applied to all the readers (both genders). The writer confirms the gender inclusive nature of his address in his general statements in v. 8 and v. 11. By pluralizing the singular elements of the quotation, the writer also applies the Scriptural exhortation to the direct situation the readers are facing. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 422, argues that the two plurals “generalize the text and apply it to the experience of the community as a whole.” Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, 195, follows this line of reasoning. Thus, the TNIV rendering of the “sons” language in this passage with a gender-neutral “children” represents a legitimate extrapolation. However, it also obscures the specificity and perhaps the theological impact of the father-son relationship the writer is highlighting.

<sup>40</sup>A form of the word for discipline occurs in 12:5, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 11. O’Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 467, notes that “the concentration of this distinctive vocabulary in Hebrews 12 unifies the section.”

<sup>41</sup>See BDAG, s.v. “ $\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha$ .” The only other uses of this term in the New Testament outside Hebrews are Eph 6:4 and 2 Tim 3:16. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 420, argues that “the biblical concept of discipline ( $\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha$ ) combines the nuances of training, instruction, and firm guidance with those of reproof, correction, and punishment.” Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, argues on the whole that  $\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha$  lacks a negative punitive sense in this passage and mostly involves the positive sense of educational instruction and moral training. He bases this observation on a study of the concept in Greek (37–66), Jewish (77–161), and biblical contexts (162–214). Croy’s analysis is helpful in highlighting this aspect of discipline here. Building on Croy’s work, Thiessen, “Hebrews 12.5–13,” 367, maintains that non-punitive discipline is involved here by seeking to demonstrate that the discussion of discipline in this passage “should be understood as an allusion to the  $\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha$  that Israel experienced in the wilderness period.” Nevertheless, because the idea of “striving against sin” is present in the immediate context (12:4), it seems best to affirm that both sides of the discipline coin are in play in 12:3–11. Further, most commentators recognize that elements of corrective discipline are present at least in the context of Prov 3:11–12.

guidance and instruction (23:19).<sup>42</sup> To illustrate, think of the hands of a father. The hands that help his daughter learn how to walk down the hallway are the same ones that will stop her from bolting down the stairs or into the street. Think of his voice of instruction. The same voice that says, “Yes, daughter, say Daddy,” is the same voice that says, “No, daughter, never say anything like that to your Mother.” This dual concept is at play in this passage and is particularly fitting for the type of argument the writer is making and the type of situation that he is addressing.

The danger for those experiencing hardship is the temptation to neglect this discipline. The action of regarding lightly involves having “little esteem for something.”<sup>43</sup> The discipline of the Lord must not be spurned nor merely tolerated, but rather esteemed and highly regarded. We could say that regarding the discipline of the Lord rightly means not regarding it lightly. The proverb characterizes taking the discipline of the Lord lightly as growing weary when the reproof of the Lord comes. The use of the phrase “grow weary” echoes and builds on its use in verse 3.<sup>44</sup> Here we find out why there is a possibility of growing weary, namely, the presence of the discipline of the Lord. From the proverb’s perspective, growing weary of the Lord’s discipline approaches a rejection of it. The idea of “reproof” most likely involves rebuke and correction for wrongdoing, but also the concept of scrutiny and careful examination. Like the writer says in Hebrews 4:12, the piercing Word of the Lord lays bare and judges “the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” No part of the soul is hidden from His sight nor exempt from His hand of discipline.

The reasoning given for these words is that “the Lord disciplines the ones that He loves” (12:6). The text makes an intimate connection between “discipline” and “love” that is not necessarily common sense.<sup>45</sup> You would not automatically put these two concepts together in this way. We typically

<sup>42</sup>In the LXX passage from Prov 3:11, παιδεία is translating a Hebrew word (בְּיָדָיִם) which can include the idea of discipline, training, and exhortation/warning. This semantic range can be seen from the usage of forms of παιδεία in the book of Proverbs. Examining the concept of discipline in the book of Proverbs is particularly important in this case because the Old Testament quotation is the way the writer introduces the concept. The rest of the paragraph is a reflective development of the quoted text. Two other important texts for the notion of fatherly discipline in the Old Testament are Job 5:27 and Deut 8:5. In light of the other allusions to the wilderness wanderings in Hebrews, the latter is especially important. Israel was to know in their hearts that God “was disciplining them” just “as a man disciplines his son.”

<sup>43</sup>The verb ὀλιγώρει involves the concept of neglect and the act of having “little esteem for something.” See BDAG, s.v. “ὀλιγώρεω.” In the LXX of Prov 3:11, ὀλιγώρει translates the Hebrew word מַצַּח, which entails the strong notion of rejection. Cf. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), s.v. “מַצַּח.” Thus, the act of growing weary of the Lord’s discipline is closely related to the act of rejecting the Lord’s discipline.

<sup>44</sup>Ellingworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 644, observes that in v. 3 “the author is anticipating the quotation of Prov 3:11 in v. 5.”

<sup>45</sup>The word order perhaps anticipates the surprising nature of the assertion. The author forefronts “whom the Lord loves.”

separate these two notions, but here we see that discipline does not necessarily entail cruelty. Just the opposite is true in this case. The motivation for the rebuke and instruction is love. Thus, where the Lord is concerned, the act of disciplining should not be viewed solely in negative terms.<sup>46</sup> The present tense of the verb also indicates that this process is ongoing. By actively training His children, the Lord demonstrates that He loves them. This discipline is further described in vivid and visceral terms as “scourging.”<sup>47</sup> The corporeal image confirms and emphasizes the physicality of this suffering. The severity of physical hardship is always for the purpose of guidance or correction, a difficult but essential element of “discipline.” The one whom the Lord loves and receives also experiences His discipline and instruction. These verses put the negative ideas of correction and suffering in an organic relationship with the positive ideas of love and sonship. The ideal son in the book of Proverbs is to accept discipline from his father, and he is also to accept discipline from the Lord. The writer of Hebrews applies this reality directly to his readers.

### Endure Hardship as Discipline

In verse 7, we see the second main point of the passage and the second command. One way to recognize the contours of this shift in the text is to visualize the writer delivering this portion of his sermon. The writer is basically taking the wisdom of the proverb and setting it down right in front of his congregation. After introducing the concept of discipline by reading a quotation from Proverbs, the preacher looks up from his text, makes eye contact, pauses, gains our full attention, and startles us with a penetrating exhortation: “Endure hardship as discipline.”

The concept of discipline that begins the sentence is drawn straight from the quoted proverb of verses 5–6. The discipline of the Lord is the interpretive lens by which the readers are to view and make sense of their suffering. Though this sentence could be taken and translated as a statement like, “it is for discipline that you endure,” I think the NIV best captures the sense of the context. The statement has the force of an engaging command to *endure*.<sup>48</sup> The verbal idea of enduring hardship as discipline drives the rest of

<sup>46</sup>Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 987, observes that “with reference to their difficulties,” the readers are “to discern the Lord’s hand lovingly training them in right character.” Cf. Ellingworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 649.

<sup>47</sup>Again, the parallelism of v. 6b to v. 6a is similar to that of v. 5c to v. 5b. O’Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 464, calls this parallelism a “chiastic form,” where the “negative theme of painful suffering is incorporated into the positive notions of love and sonship.” Cf. Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 362: “The verse is artfully arranged in an intricate pattern that interweaves chiasm and parallelism to emphasize the ‘life’ that results from true discipline.”

<sup>48</sup>Though ὑπομένετε could be taken and translated as an indicative (i.e., “it is for discipline that you endure”), the exhortatory nature and structure of the paragraph point to its imperatival force. Greenlee, *Exegetical Summary of Hebrews*, 518, surveys the proponents of both the indicative and imperative rendering. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis of Hebrews*, 265n93, understands ὑπομένετε as an imperative and argues that “the high level of second person plural imperatives in the passage makes an imperative more likely.” O’Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 464, follows the same logic. So too Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 421–22. Contra Ellingworth, *Letter*

the paragraph. The writer takes the centuries old proverb and turns it into a present word for his readers. Because the specific cause of this hardship is left unspecified, the directive here is to endure whatever trials might come along as discipline, as either correction or guidance from the Lord.<sup>49</sup> The writer suggests that this mindset will infuse their seemingly unjustified and unnecessary hardship with meaning and purpose.<sup>50</sup> This is a staggering exhortation that covers all of life's circumstances. This discipline trains a believer to be who the Lord has called him or her to be in those painful situations. Just as Christ endured undeserved hostilities, so too the readers are called upon to endure as divine discipline any similar hostilities, specific hardships, or possible consequences of sin.

After this strong command to endure hardship as discipline, two key statements follow that provide the reason to endure hardship as discipline. First, the writer says in verse 7, "God deals with you as sons." He expects his readers to endure hardship unto discipline as children of God. The phrase "as sons" is drawn directly from the proverb in verse 5.<sup>51</sup> Regardless of the origin and nature of your hardship, you can rest in the reality that it is God Himself who oversees this process as a wise and patient Father.<sup>52</sup> Your identity is defined by your relationship to the one who disciplines you. The implication of this assertion is that if you are in Christ, you are neither an orphan nor an only child. You have been adopted by the Father into a family of sons and daughters. God is dealing with and identifying you as one of His children. We might have wondered if God had abandoned us because of our pain, but the writer assures us to the contrary that God is not rejecting us. Rather, He is disciplining us, and there is a Grand Canyon separating those two notions.

After the statement that God deals with you as sons, in verses 7–8 the writer illustrates this relationship with the example of a human father and

*to the Hebrews*, 650.

<sup>49</sup>There is most likely an implied object of ὑπομένετε that can be supplied by the context. This reasoning appears to be behind the NIV's rendering of v. 7a: "Endure hardship." See also the similar renderings of the HCSB, NAB, NRSV, and NJB. O'Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 465, recognizes that commentators/translators tend to supply an implied paraphrase to clarify the "highly compressed" exhortation, but notes that "the main idea is that endurance is part of their training in faith." Cf. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 421, who notes that the meaning of this clause "can be conveyed only through paraphrastic expansion in light of the immediate context."

<sup>50</sup>The εἰς in this prepositional phrase puts forth discipline (παιδείαν) as the purpose of the enduring ("unto discipline"). See Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 362.

<sup>51</sup>The ὡς ("as") in the phrase "God deals with you as sons" (ὡς υἱοῖς ὑμῶν προσφέρεται ὁ θεός) implicates the readers as sons, rather than merely drawing a comparison between the readers and those whom God deals with as sons. Ellingworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 647, comments that "Scripture addresses the readers, not as if they were sons, but *qua* sons, in their real status."

<sup>52</sup>O'Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 465, observes that the emphatic position of ὁ θεός at the end of the sentence represents "clear evidence of God's fatherly care."



son.<sup>53</sup> We are asked, “What son is there whom his father does not discipline?”<sup>54</sup> The force of the rhetorical question is that discipline *is* a natural and essential element of being a son. When a father disciplines his son with consistency and care, he is serving his God-ordained function. It is a proper and necessary activity. In other words, the discipline experienced by a son confirms his sonship. From the flow of the argument, it is clear that a negative answer is expected in response to the question.<sup>55</sup> What son is there whom his father does not discipline? In a real sense, there is not one.<sup>56</sup> The father-son relationship demonstrates that discipline is an essential component of sonship and part of what it really means to be a son of this divine father.

Following the rhetorical question, the writer makes a related conditional statement that affirms again that discipline is a vital part of sonship. He says in verse 8, “but if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.” Underlying this statement is an immediate sense of tension at the thought of one without this discipline.<sup>57</sup> There are two ways here of expressing this disconnected state of affairs. The ones without discipline are first called “illegitimate children.” This term describes a child whose status as a member of the family is dubious and who is “without the rights and privileges of a recognized son.”<sup>58</sup> These individuals are also “not sons.” Readers of biblical literature will

<sup>53</sup>In verse 7a, the writer declares that God deals with the readers as sons, and in verses. 7bff, the writer expands various elements of that statement. The conjunction γὰρ (“for”) that begins the sentence in 7b closely subordinates the rhetorical question to the immediately preceding statement that God deals with believers as sons in 7a. Just as two main indicative statements followed the imperative of the first part of the paragraph, the imperative to endure unto discipline is also followed by two primary indicative statements. The writer gives the first one here in verse 7, and he will give the second one in the summary statement of verse 11.

<sup>54</sup>The punctuation that ends the verse (:) and the interrogative pronoun τίς (“what”) that begins it identify this clause as a rhetorical query rather than a declarative statement. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 345, notes that τίς usually introduces an “identifying” question, as is the case in this instance. As in verse 6a, the γὰρ here supplies the grounds for the preceding statement.

<sup>55</sup>Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 276, notes that with open questions such as this one, “context must provide the decisive information.”

<sup>56</sup>In objection to the writer’s point, one might point to specific and sundry examples of a son *not* being disciplined by his father, or of a son being disciplined with abusive cruelty. However, the writer speaks here of the essence of an ideal father-son relationship. The effect of his meaning might not require the readers necessarily to be able to produce personal testimony to this reality in their own past. In fact, one might assume that readers would automatically recognize that there was something amiss in a specific father-son relationship that was devoid of the type of discipline described in this passage.

<sup>57</sup>The simple repetition of the predicating verb ἔστε (“you are”) plus a negating element in both parts of the clause creates a striking contrast. If one is without (χωρὶς) discipline, he is not (οὐχ) a son.

<sup>58</sup>See BAGD, s.v. “νόθος.” The term νόθος pertains to “being born out of wedlock or of servile origin and therefore without legal status or rights.” Barbara Friberg, Timothy Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2005), 272, note that this designation applies both “substantively and symbolically.”

recognize this as a grave appellation. To be a non-son is to be cut off from the relationship that defines an individual as a redeemed believer. Thus, the writer makes a bold and startling claim when he argues that those who are devoid of discipline are severed from sonship.

This connection between suffering and sonship runs directly counter to the “believe, receive, then life’s a breeze Christianity” that has captivated the hearts of so many American believers. The Christian who anticipates a life without pain or suffering of any kind is one destined for disillusion, but this passage of biblical wisdom aims to do more than demonstrate the reality of suffering. It also seeks to equip believers to see design in the shattered pieces of that broken world.

In verses 9–10, the writer provides a second round of support for the statement that “God deals with you as sons,” by insisting that divine discipline is for the ultimate good of those who receive it. To demonstrate this truth, the writer transitions from talking about the nature of a son to talking about the nature of a father. In shifting focus, a direct comparison and contrast is made between an earthly father and the heavenly father. He says in verse 9, “Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them.” His readers have all had human fathers, and these earthly fathers were also their instructors, or discipliners.<sup>59</sup> This set-up is the expected state of affairs in a father-son relationship.<sup>60</sup> According to this text, the disciplinary role of these fathers is worthy of respect. A father corrects and guides his children, but this human example indicates a greater reality.

The force of the comparison comes in verse 9: “Shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits and live?”<sup>61</sup> If earthly sons benefited from the discipline of earthly fathers, then should they not also be subject to the “Father of spirits” all the more?<sup>62</sup> There is a clear and direct verbal contrast between the father “of the flesh” and the Father “of the spirits.” Our earthly fathers instructed us and watched over our physical lives, but our heavenly Father holds sway over our spiritual existence. The verb “be subject to” carries the idea of submission and obedience. We are to submit ourselves to the

<sup>59</sup>The accusative singular masculine noun παιδευτᾶς seems to be in an appositional relationship to πατέρας. Thus, the one who is the father is also “the one who disciplines/instructs.” One might render the relationship by saying that they are the fathers, namely, the ones who discipline.

<sup>60</sup>Cf. Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 343: “We accepted the discipline because it was their province to impose it and our duty to submit to it.” O’Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 460, sees a comparison between the “character, intention, and results” of paternal discipline and divine discipline in vv. 9–11.

<sup>61</sup>The rhetorical question draws out the force of the comparison between the two fathers. The οὐ at the beginning of the sentence demonstrates that a positive answer is expected. Thus, it has the force of an exhortation. Allen, *Hebrews*, 582, argues that the writer here is “engaging in mitigated exhortation.” In other words, “by saying ‘how much more should we submit,’ he is exhorting his readers to do just that.”

<sup>62</sup>Wescott, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 404, observes that by forefronting the phrase “shall we not much rather” and modifying the sentence structure, the writer “brings forward the overwhelming superiority of the obligation.”

instruction and discipline of the heavenly Father. We are to recognize His authority and voluntarily acknowledge our humble status in relation to Him. The discipline of our earthly fathers should convince us to submit in this way to the discipline of our heavenly Father. The last words of the sentence raise the intensity of the statement and the stakes of the situation. Those who submit to the Father in this manner also *live*. Recognizing and receiving the discipline of the Lord is a matter of life and death for the believer. Even in the face of death, this type of submission leads to life.

The comparison between the two levels of fatherhood continues in verse 10, where the writer states, “for they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them.”<sup>63</sup> The phrase “for a short time” refers to the abbreviated length of time in which the discipline took place. The appropriate time for an earthly father to discipline his child is during childhood.<sup>64</sup> The second phrase “as seems best to them” further modifies the discipline of the fathers. They disciplined “at their discretion.” They worked toward what seemed best to them from their limited perspective.<sup>65</sup> Earthly fathers do the best they can with what they have, but they are not perfect. They make mistakes. They misplace motives. They might even be overbearing in their discipline.

By contrast, the heavenly Father “disciplines us for our good” (12:10). The guidance and correction of our spiritual Father has a distinct purpose. When He disciplines, the process is far from meaningless or unnecessary. He works for the ultimate advantage and benefit of His true children, and discipline is one of His chosen methods. This is where we have to trust in His wisdom once again: *He* is the one who gets to decide what is *good* for us. To trust in God in this manner is to acknowledge that He is not only sovereign, but also good. This conviction is necessary for one to speak of God’s purpose as well as God’s provision in suffering. It must function as the inner nerve that runs throughout every difficult experience and trial.

The end of verse 10 reveals the deeper purpose of this divine discipline: “so that we may share His holiness.” A share in God’s holiness is the supreme benefit and ultimate good of those who trust in Him.<sup>66</sup> Only those who partake of His discipline get to partake in His holiness.<sup>67</sup> God’s children are to

<sup>63</sup>The close relationship with the previous sentence is confirmed by the coordinating conjunction γάρ (“for”) and the shared thematic content. This verse serves as the reason for submitting oneself to the Father.

<sup>64</sup>The phrase might also serve as a contrast to the discipline of the heavenly Father and so comment on the brevity of the hardship/discipline that is experienced during life on earth.

<sup>65</sup>See BDAG, s.v. “δοκέω,” specifically the lexical data under entry 2.b.β. The idea here includes the notion that the discipline sprang at least in part from the fathers’ own desires. Though, this does not necessarily have to be a negative statement.

<sup>66</sup>Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 344, comments that “the holiness mentioned here is rather the goal for which God is preparing his people—that entire sanctification which is consummated in their manifestation with Christ in glory.” Cf. 1 Thess 5:23, Rom 8:18, and Col 3:4.

<sup>67</sup>The writer makes use of the “partaking” language earlier in Heb 6:7, where the good land (γῆ) receives/partakes of the blessing of God (μεταλαμβάνει εὐλογίας ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ).

be holy as He is holy, and discipline is one of the ways He brings this about. In other words, the hardship of discipline is *for your good* and *for your holiness*. Recognizing the implications of these two phrases is crucial for those seeking to draw encouragement from this passage.

### When Sorrow Becomes Joy . . .

In verse 11, the writer gives the second main reason to endure hardship as discipline. After quoting and illustrating a passage from the book of Proverbs, the writer concludes this paragraph by penning a theological proverb of his own that relates to the character and effect of discipline in the life of a believer.<sup>68</sup> He writes, “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful but sorrowful, yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” He begins his summary statement by emphasizing “all discipline.”<sup>69</sup> In Hebrews 12:3–11, there is a trajectory that goes from specific striving against sin to this statement on the hardship of all discipline in general.

The writer keys in on the way we typically perceive suffering and hardship. It hurts! The grief is real, the pain throbs, the diagnosis devastates, and the loss of life is traumatizing. All discipline seems for the moment to be marked not by joy but rather by sorrow.<sup>70</sup> This statement stresses the “in the moment” temporal aspect of this discipline-induced hardship as well as the immediacy of the perceived sorrow.<sup>71</sup> In Luke 22:45, Luke describes the disciples in the garden as having fallen asleep because they were “exhausted from sorrow.” This picture of sorrowful exhaustion illustrates the disposition

Paul uses the term in a similar context in 2 Tim 2:6 to describe the diligent farmer who “receives a share” of the crops (τῶν καρπῶν μεταλαμβάνειν). Thus, in a striking metaphor, the writer asserts that the reward of a life of divine discipline is a “share” in His holiness (τῆς ἀγιότητος αὐτοῦ).

<sup>68</sup>In terms of the paragraph unit, this is the second main indicative statement following the second main imperative. Though this verse linguistically parallels the previous two in its use of a μὲν . . . δέ construction, it essentially deactivates the specific elaborations of the father-son relationship and makes a statement on “all discipline” in more general, almost proverbial terms. Thus, this sentence functions well as a summative statement concluding this pericope. Westfall, *Discourse Analysis of Hebrews*, 265, describes it as a “gnomic statement” about discipline. She also notes that “the summary forms a cohesive tie between παιδεία (discipline) and the athletic imagery in vv. 1–2 and 4 with the word γεγυμνασμένοις (trained), and signals that the athletic metaphor is still active” (Ibid., 265–66). The διὸ of v. 12 also signals a transition and supports viewing v. 11 as the last verse of the present paragraph.

<sup>69</sup>As the first element in this sentence, the phrase πᾶσα παιδεία (“all discipline”) is in an emphatic position. There is also a striking case of alliteration in the first few phrases of the sentence that makes use of a reiterated “π” sound: πᾶσα δὲ παιδεία πρὸς μὲν τὸ παρὸν. The author uses a similar device to begin the prologue (1:1). These features heighten the prominence of this summary statement.

<sup>70</sup>The word for joy (χαρᾶς) occurs three other times in the book of Hebrews (10:34, 12:2, and 13:17), and the word for sorrow (λύπη) only occurs here in the book.

<sup>71</sup>In this sentence, the μὲν . . . δέ construction also serves to highlight the contrast between the two temporal locations (i.e., “on the one hand, *now*” . . . “but on the other hand, *then*”).

addressed here. In the mind of the one experiencing the hardship of discipline, life often seems marred by sorrow and even incapable of producing joy. In these moments, it does not seem to be what is best for us, but what is worst for us. There are days when “discipline” seems like the deepest darkness imaginable, where you desperately try to make sense of your surroundings in a constant state of stumbling over yourself.

However, this perception of darkness is not the final word on our suffering. These sorrows do not have ultimate staying power. There is a future time following the present time of sorrowful discipline.<sup>72</sup> Though the present is perilous, the afterwards is on the horizon. This future time involves the fruit of the discipline we have received, namely, “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (12:11). This reward of peace and righteousness is “yielded” by the guidance and correction of the Lord to which His children have submitted themselves. Just as a field produces a crop after much labor and preparation, so too does a life of discipline yield the fruit of peace and righteousness.<sup>73</sup>

This reward is only for “those who have been trained” by the difficult discipline mentioned throughout this paragraph. The idea here involves the result of intense training over an extended period of time. Those who receive the peaceful fruit of righteousness are those who have been brought into a state of “being trained.” Believers are to endure as “trained” sons, as those who have maintained their training. From the writer’s perspective, this is the only way to “run the race set before us” (12:1). The only hope we have for being able to endure the running of this race is if we have been trained by the discipline of the Lord.<sup>74</sup> An out of shape runner could never hope to cross the finish line of a marathon. Neither can an untrained believer hope to persevere to the end in a way that honors the Lord and respects his authority.

By holding out this future reward in front of his readers, the writer reminds us that we must be careful not to assess God’s discipline by the measuring stick of their own temporary feelings and emotions.<sup>75</sup> The very real

<sup>72</sup>In Heb 10:34, the writer points out an example from the readers’ own experience of the effect of looking to a future reward in the midst of trials. He reminds them, “For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one” (10:34). Here, they were able to experience the sorrow of material loss with joy because they had their gaze set on a higher reality. In terms of 12:11, they were holding out for “the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

<sup>73</sup>The language of “yielding” is part of an agricultural metaphor. Thus, there is a blending of athletic and agricultural imagery in this final word about discipline. David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the ‘Epistle to the Hebrews’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 174, argues that though these fruits are “gifts of eschatological salvation that point to the new age and the future perfection,” there is nevertheless “no need to restrict the enjoyment of these benefits to the future.” In other words, there is an already/not yet aspect involved in the yielding of this reward in the life of the believer. The writer also makes use of the “yield” metaphor in Heb 6:7–8.

<sup>74</sup>In Heb 5:14, the writer also makes use of the training metaphor in relation to living a holy life. He writes, “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”

<sup>75</sup>Cf. Calvin, *Hebrews*, 320: “The object, then, of this admonition is, that chastisements cannot be estimated aright if judged according to what the flesh feels under them, and that

sorrow of our situation will be replaced by the joy that awaits us. In the New Testament, the two concepts of joy and sorrow often keep company. Building on the argument developed in Hebrews 12, James urges his readers, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (Jas 1:2).<sup>76</sup> In a context similar to Hebrews 12:11, Jesus tells His disciples in John 16 that though they will grieve His absence, their sorrow will become joy.<sup>77</sup> These two expressions represent the full gamut of human emotion and typify the “pilgrim character of hope” that believers experience in this lifetime.<sup>78</sup>

### **. . . And that Scream Becomes a Shout**

Though the world we live in is full of pain, there have been hints that a day is coming when all will be made right. We have heard rumors of another world. Later in Hebrews 12, readers are given a glimpse of the final destination of the race that they are running: the heavenly kingdom (12:18–24). And entering into the kingdom means entering into the presence of the King. The peaceful fruit of righteousness is the kind of reward that is enjoyed at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Christ, who is our hope, suffered and made the ultimate sacrifice, and one day His scream will change its tone. On that day, the “Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess 4:16). Rather than closing their eyes to the pain around them, believers have been granted the prospect of a different line of sight. A believer is someone who endures in this life by “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus”

therefore we must fix our eyes on the end . . . and by the fruit of righteousness he means the fear of the Lord and a godly and holy life, of which the cross is the teacher.”

<sup>76</sup>James continues by encouraging his readers to “let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (Jas 1:3–4). As in Heb 12, James addresses this issue in relation to growing in maturity and striving against doubt in the midst of trial and temptation. Thinking in terms of the canonical context of the New Testament (e.g., in the ordering of English Bibles), the beginning of the book of James serves as an important development of the discussion regarding the nature of suffering at the end of the book of Hebrews. These two passages complement each other and are important texts for understanding the dialectic relationship between joy and sorrow. See also what Paul says about these matters in Rom 5:3–4 and Rom 8:18.

<sup>77</sup>Cf. John 16:21–22. In relation to the tension between joy and sorrow in the Christian life, Travis, “Hope,” 322, observes that “a Christian’s hope is not utopian. He expects progress but not the perfection which will only come by God’s own act at the final coming of Christ. He can cope with human failure without despair, because he trusts ‘the God of hope’ (Rom 15:13) whose kingdom is surely coming.”

<sup>78</sup>See Stephen R. Spencer, “Hope,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 307. Cf. the sojourn theme in Heb 11:8–16. “By faith,” Abraham lived “as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land . . . for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (11:9–10). In Heb 11, the individuals considered faithful are those who confess “that they were strangers and exiles on the earth” and who “desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (11:16).

(Titus 2:13). If you suffer in this world as sons and daughters of God, hold on, Hope is coming, and He will make all things right.<sup>79</sup>

Toward the end of the vision he sees in the book of Revelation, John is shown a foretaste of this coming day. He recounts, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1).<sup>80</sup> He also sees “the holy city, new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband” (21:2). He then hears a “loud voice from the throne,” which declares, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them” (21:3). In a recognition of the pain and suffering that has taken place between the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem, John is told that God Himself “will wipe away every tear from their eyes” and “there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying or pain” (21:4). This scene provides a picture of the fulfillment of the new covenant. God and mankind have been reconciled, sins have been forgiven, pain is no more, and the curse has been reversed. In short, paradise has been restored.

This vision John sees on the Island of Patmos is drawn from a prophetic vision of this recreation in the book of Isaiah. There the Lord declares, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind” (Isa 65:17). This promise of things to come should cause us to “be glad and rejoice forever” in what the Lord creates (65:18). The Lord himself will “rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in [His] people.” On this day, the effects of suffering will be silenced, for “the voice of weeping” and the “sound of crying” will “no longer be heard” (65:19). Ours is a world where parents have to bury their newborn children, where sons have to bury their middle-aged fathers, and where friends have to bury the companions of their youth. But on that day, “no longer” will there be “an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his days” (65:20). Then the children of the Lord “will not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity,” but the offspring of the Lord will be blessed, as the lion lies down with the lamb and all is made right (65:23).

<sup>79</sup>The exhortation to wait and hope is important elsewhere in Hebrews. In 9:28, the writer encourages his readers that will one day Jesus will “appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.” He notes in 10:36–37, “You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, he who is coming will come, and will not delay” (10:36–37). Finally, in the prologue to the “hall of faith” in chapter eleven, he reminds his readers that faith is the “assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (11:1).

<sup>80</sup>The newness of this new creation is indicated by the fact that “the first heaven and the first earth passed away,” and as a result “there is no longer any sea.” Pilchan Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: A Study of Revelation 21–22 in the Light of its Background in Jewish Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 268, notes that the use of the word *καὶνὸν* here indicates “the creation of a universe which, though it has been gloriously and radically renewed in quality or nature, stands in continuity with the present one.” Similarly, Robert W. Wall, *Revelation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1991), 247, calls *καὶνὸν* an “eschatological catchword” that conveys the consummation and renewal of the “old order.”

Though the race set before us is long and strewn with suffering, one day the runners will lift up their heads to hear him “who sits on the throne” say, “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev 21:5). On that day, as the finish line comes into sight, the race will be finished, and “the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” will once again say, “It is done” (21:6). Not only has Jesus gone before us, He also stands at the finish line. Looking forward to this future reality is the transformative gift that Christian hope offers to hurting believers.

The readers of Hebrews were striving to persevere in the midst of suffering. One of the purposes of Hebrews 12:3–11 is to encourage them in this situation to press on in the faith. These believers had *forgotten* key truths that had the ability to sustain them. They had forgotten something about their past: Christ has gone before them (12:3–4). They had forgotten something about their future: the peaceful fruit of righteousness (12:11). And they had forgotten something about their present struggle: God is dealing with them as sons (12:5–10). The writer addresses this theological amnesia directly by pointing his readers to Jesus, the One who suffered on their behalf.

The same exhortation should still carry weight for biblical readers, and our primary response should be the same as well. The writer has given us two commands in this passage: to consider Him and to endure hardship. We can see the relationship between the two by reversing their order. We can only endure hardship *by* considering Him.<sup>81</sup> As we consider Christ, we must never forget to remember the exhortation that God has given us in Hebrews 12:3–11. *Remember* something about your past: Christ has gone before you. *Remember* something about your future: the peaceful fruit of righteousness. *Remember* something about your current suffering: God is dealing with you as sons and daughters. This is a word you will never want to forget. You will want to have these words woven deep into the fabric of your being, so that when the pain of suffering begins to throb, it will do so to the rhythm of the Gospel proclamation: You are His, and you can suffer in His arms.

In the end, remember that the Bible presents to us a God who beckons in the midst of pain, “Be still, my child, and cling to your Redeemer.”

<sup>81</sup>Puritan pastor Richard Baxter makes a similar exhortation in *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1847), 235: “If you say that your comfort is all in Christ, I must tell you, it is a Christ remembered and loved, and not a Christ forgotten or only talked of, that will solidly comfort you.” Modernized wording.