



**Series:** Hebrews 12

**Sermon Text:** Hebrews 12.3-13

**Sermon Title:** Don't Give Up! In Christ...Get Up! (What God is Doing in Your Suffering)

### **Starting Point**

What a weekend last weekend! Praise God for those of you who gave your lives to the Lord and for others who are taking steps to come back to the Lord. I recognize last weekend our best guess is that at least 25% of you were with Mercy Church for the very first time. And so if that's you, you are not alone, and what I want to do is invite you to starting point RIGHT AFTER this service. I'm going to host it along with a couple of our team members here and I'll give you the brief 15-20 minute version of what we are all about here and what it would look like to plug in and take your next steps with Jesus here at Mercy Church. And listen we are all about doing things TOGETHER. Last week I told you about Getting Baptized or Giving your life to Christ look at your neighbor & say, "If you want to go, I'll go." Well, this week that's still true. One of our values is we help each other take next steps in following Jesus. Your walk with God is a community project. Every step of the way. So, if investigating how Mercy can play a role in that is your next step...stick around. And I want you to look to the person you came with and say, "If you want to go, I'll go." Mercy Members, y'all go first in this.

### **Introduction**

Over the next 3 weeks I'm going to give you 3 sermons that come out of Hebrews Chapter 12. This chapter has captivated my heart and mind since August of last year. I preached the first 2 verses the first two weeks of the year and I'm excited to preach the rest of it now. Here's why I'm doing it now. On Easter we celebrated the Resurrection. The center of our hope. For those of you who are new to Christianity you'll hear more as we go through this sermon about why this resurrection matters so much. But in short, the gospel is an announcement about God's love for sinners like you and me. You can receive forgiveness for your sins and a second chance at life here and the promise of eternal life with God. It's the greatest news in the history of the world and this sermon and every sermon you ever hear at Mercy is going to point you to that news.

What makes me so excited about Hebrews 12 is that it offers powerful hope for enduring the struggles of life as one who believes Jesus really died for our sins and really rose again from the grave and really ascended. So these 3 sermons should be sermons of immense HOPE for Christians. Specifically, Christians who are growing weary and feel like giving up. And I think many need the hope in these verses. Because there is a strange relationship between peace and struggle in the Christian life.

**Peace** – Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest (Matt 11.28). In prayer present your requests to God and the PEACE that passes understanding will guard you (Phil 4.7).

**Struggle** – Strive to enter by the narrow door. For many I tell you will seek to enter and not be able (Luke 13.24). Paul says in 2 Timothy 4.7 I have FOUGHT the good FIGHT. I have finished the course. He talks

about the Christian life as a race & a fight. Hebrews 12.1 – let us run the race with endurance. Eph 6 – Put on the full ARMOR of God.

And if you talk to people who have been Christians for a while they will acknowledge this strange dynamic. But they are not contradictions. The main goal of our struggle is to rest. To rest in the promises of God and not the promises of sin. And even as we struggle, we do so with a deep abiding rest in our spirit because Christ has already won our victory over sin and is working in us on our behalf.

This chapter, and really the whole book, talk about how to walk in that strange relationship. And I think we need it right now. And the main point of these three sermons is that in order to endure we need A BIGGER VIEW OF GOD. The God of Hebrews 12 is MASSIVE and MYSTERIOUS and HOLY. He is at the same time a loving father AND a consuming fire. YOU CANNOT fully comprehend this God. But you CAN worship him. You can find comfort in the mystery. It's incredible. And my prayer as you encounter this God is HOLY AWE. Like I want you to wind up in silent prayer for an hour a day because you've realized the God of your 15 second dinner prayer is WAY bigger, way more involved, and way more worthy than what you've given him. I'm praying your worship is filled with a kind of wonderment and fullness and your hours at work are spent listening for what his Spirit may be leading you towards because you've become more aware of the availability of a relationship with this God. A Bigger View of God.

Today we talk about being children of God. **Specifically, we are going to talk about God's providence in the suffering of his children and how his providence can strengthen us for the struggle.** So let me go

ahead and say something here. I DO believe Hebrews 12 is powerful. That it carries immense hope for you. But it is not a chapter of scripture people naturally gravitate towards and celebrate. Dealing with God's providence in our pain is uncomfortable. *"In other words, the more easy and pain-free your life has been, the less you will cherish the kind of spirituality taught in this book. And the more you have suffered, the more you will cling to the precious teachings of this book — if you are willing to believe them."*<sup>1</sup>

But that is a big *if*. Because this is not an easy feel good chapter with five steps to make the best of your struggles. It is a massive statement about the gracious providence of God over the suffering that his people go through. The main idea of this sermon is **Don't Give up. In Christ...Get up!**

Let's walk through this passage. Let the passage speak on God's providence in our suffering. Let's expand our view of God.

**3 For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you won't grow weary and give up. 4 In struggling against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.**

Consider - Think on. Dwell on. Remember. It seems critical to not growing weary is to REMEMBER. Is to draw your mind to Christ. Consider him.

\*\*And there is something that he is saying happens supernaturally – you consider him SO THAT you won't grow weary and give up. Isn't that awesome!?

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<sup>1</sup> Piper, [The Painful Discipline of our heavenly father](#).

There is a legacy of suffering this call is built on. Hebrews 11 concludes listing people from Israel's history who suffered and died for their faith. Who the world was not worthy of. Because they believed they had something BETTER WITH the LORD than WITHOUT him. Something worth dying for. Then he says look at Christ. Look at the hostility HE endured from sinners against himself. Legacy continues.

And now the church is struggling. Let's be clear – the struggle is hostility they are experiencing for believing and preaching Jesus is the Savior of the world. This is persecution. This persecution hasn't reached bloodshed yet like it did in OT or with Jesus. But hardship is on them and eventually we know there will be martyrs. And as you and I read this we know more Christians were killed for their faith in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than there were in the previous 19 centuries combined. And in the post-Christian west that we live in let's be clear – you will suffer for being a Christian. It USED to be culturally normative, and right now it's still culturally permissible. But decreasingly so.

The worldview that has remained unchanged for 2000 years is being increasingly classified as intolerant & bigoted. Your views on gender identity and sexuality are being backed into a corner. But the members of this local church are not in danger of martyrdom. But even still...this is talking to the ones growing weary and while they won't say it they are thinking about giving up. Giving up on Jesus, giving up on the Christian life, you are asking yourself is this all worth it? Cause you are TIRED. WEARY. Not just your body. Your SOUL.

And before we get any further you need to see God saying I KNOW! I SEE YOU! This was written 2000 years ago and people from another

continent in another time you thought you had nothing in common with were TIRED & WEARY from the struggle of walking with Jesus. They had peace but they also had a soul weariness. God Sees you. And the first thing he says is LOOK AT Jesus.

Before God gives you knowledge he is saying to you twice in back to back verses...I love you. And the proof of my love is in Jesus and what he did for you. That hasn't gone anywhere. Hear everything I have for you while staring at the cross. Jesus went FIRST and Jesus went FARTHER than you have gone. That's why verse 2, that we spent 2 weeks on in January, says let us fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith. Who for the joy before him endured the cross.

And the JOY before him is you and I. The cross wasn't joy. The forgiveness the cross won for us...that was his joy. Our eternal adoption as sons and daughters of God...was his joy. The reason I spend a moment there is because suffering is a spiritual catalyst. It MOVES you. But you have a say in where it moves you. You are never the same person on the other side of suffering. There is no return to the way things were because YOU are different after suffering. The question for today is where will you let your suffering take you? Will you let it lead you further from God? Or closer to him?

Ok get ready God is about to talk about what he is doing in your suffering. To do that he's going to recall to our minds Proverbs 3.11-12

5 And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons:

My son, do not take the Lord's *discipline* lightly or lose heart when you are *reproved* by him,

6 for the Lord **disciplines** the one he loves and **punishes** every son he receives.<sup>2</sup>

7 Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline — which all receive — then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Endure suffering as discipline. God is dealing with you as sons. How does that rest with you? Like before I explain it. Some of you this leads you to worship already. Because you are on the other side and you've welcomed the work God planned to do in you through your suffering.

Where does suffering come from? Well, it seems in this passage from two places.

It comes from sin. In this specific instance it comes from acts of hostility by sinners towards Christians. That makes sense to us. It's the second source of suffering that is harder to deal with. This suffering is attributed to God. The PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS is the loving discipline of their heavenly father. That is the great burden of this passage.

So what do we make of this? Well, I actually think it is most important to read the text for what it says first. **Then** move towards application for us. That's bible reading 101. Understand it THEN apply it. And what it says is that sonship...and when you see sons see it as it was written...male nouns like "mankind" acted as a universal category for both male and females.

And what its saying is that whatever suffering is, it is something that comes to those God identifies as his sons. As his children. God's involvement in your suffering is from the position of father. And this suffering equated as discipline in this passage. And discipline is a good thing for fathers to give to their sons.

After all, he says, the proof that someone is a true son of a father is the father's discipline. If you claim to have a father — and you've never received discipline from this father — you ARE NOT his true child! Discipline is the proof of sonship. And the absence of discipline...means there must not be a parent. What son is there that a father doesn't discipline? You see a wild crazy child with no respect and no self-control you think...what's wrong with his parents? His parents must not love him. Cause if they did...that boy would be getting a whoopin' about now. Discipline IS an act of LOVE.

9 Furthermore, we had human fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn't we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time based on what seemed good to them,

He's now sayin' hey think about your own life. And I know not every one of us had dads. Some of our dads left. Some of our dads passed away. And you FELT the gap in your life if he wasn't around. The fact that you are alive today probably means your mom or someone was an absolute super hero. But even if you HAD a good dad...who did his very best...He still was finite in knowledge. Based on what seemed good to them. That's the bible confirming that all parents are just MAKING IT UP AS THEY GO ALONG. How many tactics have each of us tried and justified it with, "Yeah, that seems right." The longer you are a parent the less you know what you are doing.

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<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 3.11-12

- Matt choking himself and blaming me.

and even the best dads are only able to discipline you until you age into adulthood. They are limited in knowledge and in time. He says if the discipline of those fathers was good...THEY WERE JUST A middle school team...God is major league. How MUCH MORE would you benefit if you submitted to the father of spirits...AND LIVE!

- I'm telling you that the running theme of the gospel is that when you submit to God it feels like death for a bit...and then you find LIFE. It's the mystery of the gospel. Submitting is living. Trusting God and submitting to his discipline actually yields LIFE. And this passage is God saying remember how you didn't LIKE discipline but you are thankful for it?
- if God has chosen to reveal himself as father – A good father who loves and cares. The one who created fatherhood... then it is logical...and even more importantly it is biblical...that we should expect something from him that FEELS LIKE discipline. That feels unwelcomed, painful, and yet is for our good. The Lord DISCIPLINES the one he loves.

but he does it for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness. 11 No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful.

- Feels Painful. What are painful things in your life right now. It is possible according to scripture that these things are God's discipline for you. Again that's the mystery I do NOT speak lightly. Because I know over the course of the day I will be preaching this message to trauma and abuse victims. I've been praying God give me the Father's words here. The counselor's words. And I hope you don't forget verses 1-3 just because we are in these verses. God loves you, Christ on the cross proves it, and he's gone further even than you. And

now his spirit, his very presence, is with you. I'm going to explain what we mean by discipline in a minute.

Later on, however, it yields the **peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.**

- Y'all this is the promise. Later on. The hope of this passage is a future hope. The processes of God in your heart trusting him right now in your suffering...will LATER ON...yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness.
- I don't know much about wine making. But as I was talking this sermon out with Courtney she mentioned a book she read by Beth Moore called Chasing Vines. Where she drew out the analogy beautifully about how the best wine is produced by vines that undergo stress. It's through a season of stress & a little drought even that really good grapes are produced. After the stress the vine undergoes, the fruit is produced. If no stress, then no fruit. Analogy to your suffering is – The active depending on God IN SUFFERING is producing something different than it would if you were not suffering. The pain is necessary for the kind of fruit God is producing.
- And the fruit is peaceful fruit of righteousness. You will start to look and act more like Jesus. And it will yield peace in your life and in the lives of others.

12 Therefore, strengthen your tired hands and weakened knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed instead. – Hebrews 12:1-13 (CSB)

- THEREFORE – In recognition that God your heavenly father. Who loves you and is working something in you in this...is with you...Therefore...which means: So what do you do about this discipline you are feeling right now?

- STRENGTHEN your tired hands and weakened knees. **Don't give up in your own strength, get up in God's strength. In Christ, Get UP and walk. One step at a time.**
- That's the word to each of us today. Don't give up. God is still with you. Your STRUGGLE IS NOT IN VAIN. Your Suffering is NOT pointless. It DOES matter how you walk through this. And you gotta walk DEPENDENTLY. Not independently. It is EXHAUSTING to suffer independently.
- Make straight paths for your feet – You hear the echo of Proverbs 3.6 he will make your paths straight. Get up and walk forward in obedience to the Lord. And if you will trust him enough to walk forward in obedience...healing will come. Strength will come. Fruit will come.
- suffering can produce dislocation or healing depending on how you receive it.

Where does strength to get up in Christ come from?

### 1. Trust your heavenly father

I think the hardest thing for grown adults is to go to God like a child goes to a parent. Our skeptical outlook on life demands evidence & explanation. We want to know WHY things are the way they are. And when this mystery of God's providence over our suffering collides with the biblical truth that in him is no sin, no evil...we just have a hard time with it. We forget that if he really is GOD, then there has to be some things we will never understand. Do I know WHY hurricanes devastate the particular regions they do? No. I don't know why God

allowed a volcano to erupt last week. I don't know why he allowed the evils that affect millions and the evils that affect the one in silence. He doesn't call me to know why. He tells me that like a father...he hasn't left me. He tells me that in the greatest moment of agony I can have PEACE that passes understanding. I read Genesis 50.20 where Joseph looks at his brothers who ganged up on him, wanted to kill him, and instead sold him into a certain death in slavery. And yet when he reconciles with them he says **19 But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20 You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result — the survival of many people – Genesis 50:19-20**

God planned it for good. That is challenging to me because it doesn't fit my view of God if my view of God's providence is confined to only things that feel positive. If I get the parking spot, the house, the job, the spouse – then God provided. But if I didn't...or if I get fired...this is saying God was providential in that as well. I told you this sermon, this passage, will call you to expand your view of God.

*"In other words, in your pain, you are not being treated as a slave or as an enemy. You are being treated as a loved child of God. The issue is: will you believe this? Will you let the Word of God settle the issue for you, so that when the suffering comes, you don't turn on God and put him in the dock and prosecute him with accusations? He probably will not tell you why it is your turn, or why it is happening now, or why there is this much pain, or why it lasts this long. But he has told you what you need to know: it is the love of an all-wise Father to a child. Will you trust him?"<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> Piper, [The Painful Discipline of our heavenly father.](#)

And you must must remember he is not sending you away to suffer on your own. Unique thing about Christian God. he draws you close as you suffer and struggle. Remember the Christian life is both a struggle from a place of peace and a peace refined by struggle.

For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men. Lam 3.31-33

## 2. Preach the Gospel to yourself

Let me explain what I mean. The call not to give up begins with REMEMBER CHRIST. Like...remembering isn't just to make you feel guilty about your complaining because Jesus had it worse. It's that there is actual POWER in recalling the gospel to mind. In replacing your thoughts with God's words.

See, the most influential person on your life, is you. You listen to you more than you listen to anyone else. We are always interpreting the events and situations around us and quietly creating a story out of it about who we are and what it all means for us. We are our greatest influence. And sometimes our own voice, still affected by the reality of sin like everything else, can be very dangerous to listen to.

I brought this up when we went through Psalm 42 a few years ago. One minute David is saying "Have you forgotten me God?" And then David interrupts his own line of thinking. And this isn't multiple personality disorder. This is us getting to watch David come to his senses right before our eyes. He says

"[11] Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."

David STOPS LISTENING TO HIMSELF AND STARTS PREACHING TO HIMSELF! And that is what we have to do in suffering. You are your biggest influence on your life. This is the great art of enduring suffering. It is preaching to ourselves instead of listening to ourselves. When the thought comes in "It's never going to get better." The reply needs to be "SELF...HOPE IN GOD!" God came & died for me to set me free from Sin and I know in my struggle I can come back to his promises for me.

I'm in that place where I feel like God has forgotten me and I'm scared. **Hebrews 13.5** – He will never leave me or forsake me. The lord is my helper whom shall I fear?

## 3. Get a sparring partner

the heart is deceitful. And even though we know all these promises sometimes we just can't seem to preach to ourselves. And we need someone to take God's promises and punch us in our thick head with them. A sparring partner trains you. I always think of Rocky & Apollo Creed. You need someone who will see a weakness or a blindspot and call it out. And that's gonna hurt! they may even say you need to take a step to see a professional counselor so that you can get the help you need. And you gotta be open to that And that may hurt. But better that short term pain than the enemy destroying you! The enemy will make his home in that weakness and destroy you through it. I've seen it happen.

Get a friend or two and get to work. Why we are so crazy about community groups here.

Let me close with this word I've shared with you before. It's from Charles Spurgeon who went through a lot of struggle in his life and at the same time was a very gifted preacher. The fruit of

Great deeps of trial bring with them great deeps of promise! For you much afflicted ones, there are words, great and mighty, which are not meant for other saints of easier experience. You shall drink from deep golden goblets reserved for those giants who can drink great potions of wormwood... Trials are mighty enlargers of the soul!

Yes, feel the loneliness of life! Here is a dreadful deep for you to sail on, and a tempestuous deep much to be feared, for your little boat may easily be wrecked. But don't forget that there is *another* deep, whose remembrance will remove from you the bitterness of your present sorrow—there is love in heaven towards you which will never grow cold—immortal and unchanging love!

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<sup>4</sup> Spurgeon on Psalm 42.