

Is God Punishing Me?

By Dr. John Street

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Pastor Ty Blackburn: We are delighted this morning to have bringing the word of God, Dr. John Street. John Street is, first of all, the dad of Melissa Arnds so Melissa's dad is here. Now, Melissa and Jess Arnds have come to be a part of our church in July on our staff officially, moved here in June, and we're so delighted that he's our full-time Associate Pastor and to have Melissa and their three precious kids is truly a gift from the Lord and we're grateful. And one of the added blessings is that when John Street comes into town, we have an opportunity to ask him to preach for us so he was gracious to agree to do that, in fact, had a meeting yesterday with our elders; it was a real blessing to have him share some time with us talking through ministry philosophy and things like that and then to have him teach Sunday morning Bible study today. Thank you so much for doing that as well, and his wife, Janie, of course, is in town and we're delighted to have both of them, and I know their grandkids are glad to have them here.

Dr. Street is the Professor of Biblical Counseling and Chair of the Graduate Program in Biblical Counseling at the Master's College and also at the Master's Seminary. He's also the President of ACBC which is the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (it's the organization formerly known as NANC). So ACBC. He has pastored churches in Ohio and for a number of years now and since he's been out in California, he has served as an elder among the elders at Grace Community Church where John MacArthur is pastor. He taught at both Cedarville and Cornerstone Universities, a regular contributor to journals of theology and counseling, frequent conference speaker around the world, and we are delighted and honored to have him here today. He has four children, they have four children and how many grandchildren now? Six. Okay, we can personally verify three so he's got three more and we're delighted to have you. Thank you. Come and bring God's word to us, Brother. Thank you so much for being here.

Dr. John Street: Thank you, Pastor Ty. It's a joy to be here and I must confess to you that probably in this church I'm better known as Poppa, alright, than anything else. So you'll see my grandkids sort of light up because they know that ice cream is coming when I'm around, and I love...I didn't realize how good I was at spoiling until I had grandkids. I'm really good at it, not with the kids but with the grandkids. You know, you go in and you give them all the ice cream they want and then you leave, alright? Then you just leave them to the parents and what's left over, that's the idea.

So, it's such a delight to be here, especially now that Jess is your Associate Pastor. He is a joy. I can remember when – I was telling this story yesterday – when Ty originally contacted me and said, "We're starting to look for an Associate Pastor. Here's what we're looking for. Here's the qualifications and what we really need at this church." And I read through those qualifications and as I read through them, I'm going, "Wow, that matches my son-in-law." I had other guys there at the seminary and the college that I could have referred to but I didn't know any of the other guy's matched that job description as well as he did. And I sat there in California thinking to myself, "Alright, do I really want to send my son-in-law to Georgia? Is that what I really want to do?" And so I wrote the email and I sat there and pondered it and prayed about it before I hit that send button and I thought, "Okay, nah, this is not gonna happen. I'm going to go ahead and send it but it ain't gonna happen." So I hit the send button and I'm going, "Alright, Lord, whatever happens happens." And here he is. He's here and so now my grandkids, we have to travel here on a regular basis. We're just going to have to do that in order to see the grandkids and also spend some time with you as well but it's such a joy to be here.

Grab your Bible, would you please, your copy of the word of God and let's go over to Hebrews 12 and we're interested in verses 7 through 11. I wish we had more time to spend on this particular chapter but we're just going to focus in on verses 7 through 11. Hebrews 12:7-11. By the way, I want to say thank you so much for opening your arms to the Arnds family. They have felt really very very welcomed and received here so thank you for all of that and all of your help in helping them get situated and adjusted in here. They're very very grateful for that.

Well, let's pick up and read in verse 7, shall we?

7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Over the past 37 years of ministry, I've had an opportunity to sit across the table or across the desk from a lot of hurting people and sometimes they will share their lives with me, and in doing so, they'll share some of the pain and the difficulty and the suffering that they've been through and even some of the things that they are presently going through, and invariably at the end of that, with tears running down their face, they will look at me and they will ask the penetrating question, "Is God punishing me? Is God punishing me?" Maybe you've asked that question before. Maybe in your own struggles and your own circumstances of life and some of the difficulties and the suffering and the losses that you have gone through, the grief that you've suffered, the hardships that you've had to endure,

you've wondered the same thing, "Is that what's going on? Is God punishing me?" I think every one of us can think back upon certain circumstances in our life where we didn't respond to the circumstances in a godly way, in fact, we responded in them sometimes in very sinful ways or hateful ways or in anger or hostility that certainly wasn't honoring to Christ and, "Is that the reason why I'm going through what I'm going through? Because I didn't respond to those circumstances the way I should have responded?" Those are great questions. "Why have I lost my son? Why have I lost my daughter? Why have I lost my wife or my husband? Why have I lost my health? Why have I experienced any of that? Is God punishing me?" It may be a question that you've asked.

There are four things I want you to understand about this passage today but before we get to these four things, I want to share with you a story. Back about five or six years ago now, every so often I have an opportunity to go to Switzerland and then go to Germany and to train pastors there, and we were in Cologne, Germany at that particular time and there were about 250 pastors that had come from all over Germany, some from outside of Germany, that were there in the church at Cologne to receive training, especially in personal ministry and in counseling and discipleship areas, and I had been teaching all day along with another colleague of mine, and I have a good friend of mine, his name is Martin Manton, and Martin is a tall, ball-headed, Swiss guy who speaks fluent English and German, and I love working with him because I can talk just like I'm talking with you just without hesitation and he translates it in flowing style right into German. I don't even have to stop and wait for him to catch up. It's just natural for him.

So he and I had been working together all day and I was teaching and he was translating and we were standing and going back and back and forth and I had the last address of the day, it was between 7 and 8 o'clock at night and I had just finished that last address and I could hear my bed calling me, "John, come to me. You've been gone for so long." So I was tired, Martin was tired, and so I'm wrapping up my notes and out of my peripheral vision, I saw a woman coming up the side aisle, an elderly woman, probably about 75 years of age. She had a long coat on and a scarf tied around her head and the first thing I noticed about her was how swollen her ankles were which suggested congestive heart failure, and she came up and grabbed my big translator by the arm and she pointed a bony finger at me and he said, "She wants to talk with you." And I was so tired, I was ready to say to her, "Listen, you come back tomorrow. I'll be more than willing to talk with you but I'm not responsible for anything I say after 8 o'clock at night." But before I could say that, he turns to me and says, "She wants to tell you something that she has never told anybody her entire life." When a 75-year-old woman says that kind of thing to me, okay, she's got my attention. I'm going, "Okay, well, let's go over here to the side and we'll sit down in three chairs and let's sit down and talk."

So we went off to the side and sat down and I said to her, "Tell me what God has laid upon your heart. Why did you feel compelled to come up and share this about your life?" And she started into a story and I'm only going to give you just a little teeny bit of the story because it almost took her an hour and a half to tell the whole story. She started into a story on her growing up. She was in, at that particular time in the church there in Cologne was a German Russian church, a German Russian Baptist Church, and she had

grown up actually in Russia under the Soviet rule. She had grown up in central Russia and her father was a pastor, he was an illegal pastor there under the Soviet rule and they had a church around 300 people that met illegally out in the woods and she grew up in that church. She became a teenage gal and served Christ there.

Now, if you know anything about your history, you know that back in the 1700s, in the late 1700s, Catherine the Great ruled Russia. She had taken over after the assassination of her husband, Peter III, and at that particular time in the late 1700s, Russia was extremely poor. The economy was horrible there in Russia. It's bad today but it was really bad then, and the only thing that Russians had in a lot of quantity was land, and so Catherine the Great went to Germany and at that particular time the Germans were the best farmers in the world, and said to German farmers, "If you're willing to come to Russia and to train our farmers the way you do farming, then we will give you large plots of lands and you can have your own huge farms there in Russia." So thousands of Russian farmers left Germany or thousands of farmers, German farmers, left Germany and went to Russia and taught the Russian farmers how to farm and then they received these large plots of land. My wife and I were just in Samarra, Russia just last summer and if you go into central Russia, you can still find these conclaves of German farmers dotted all over Russia from that particular time when that immigration occurred into Russia, and she was one of the descendants of one of those farmers and her father was a pastor.

She grew up in this church. She became a teenage gal. She ran into a young man in that particular church and she fell head-over-heels in love with that young man. She believed that he really loved her. She made a very very tragic and sinful mistake and she spent the night with that young man and as a result of that one experience she became pregnant. She had to confess it to her father and her mother and her mother and father were beside themselves. This brought shame not only upon her and her family but upon their church and the whole community at that particular time and, of course, as Christians, abortion was not an option so they were trying to decide exactly what they were going to do as it became more and more apparent that she was pregnant. What made matters worse, she told me, was the fact that after she made the announcement and the young man found out, then he didn't want to have anything to do with her and that really crushed her because she thought that they were just totally in love with one another. That just crushed her.

Her uncle eventually came along and offered an option. He said, "What we need to do is take her and we need to go place her in another job in another town. Let her work and supply for herself during that particular time," and jobs were really hard to come by back then; this is early 1900s. "And then she can give birth to the baby, give it up for adoption and then come back and that way she can save face for what has happened." She didn't like that idea at all. She wanted to stay there with her family, with her friends, with everybody that she knew, but her parents, not knowing what else to do, decided to agree to the uncle's plan. The uncle was able to get her a job in another town a long ways away and she described for me the day that they took her to the train station, how angry she was at the young man who had forsaken her, at her father and mother for agreeing to the uncle's plan, at her uncle, her brothers and sisters. She got on that train and she was so angry she absolutely refused to say goodbye to anybody and that was the last time she

ever saw them. She got on this train in anger and she headed towards this new town, new job. She arrived there, got off the train, met an individual and to her horror, she finds out that this job was in a prison camp of over 600 men and she was the only cook and she was responsible for producing two meals a day for 600 men and she was the only one in that kitchen. Then she began to describe for me how every day, sometimes repeatedly, she was raped over and over and over and over again. It was hell on earth for her.

One day several months later, she's walking into town in the middle of wintertime by herself to get supplies for the kitchen and the baby decides to come and she sits down in the snow, delivers her own baby and this baby is the object of all of her suffering and all of her pain and the fact that she had to leave her parents. She is so angry, she stands up after delivering her own baby and throws it out across the ice. She kills her baby. And I look at her and the tears are flowing down her cheeks, and I look at my big translator and he's got tears in his eyes.

Through a set of circumstances, after several months, she was able to get away from that job and she made it to East Germany while the wall was still up. She got a job there. Eventually she ran into another young man, they fell in love, this time she got married. Not long after she was married, she got pregnant and as soon as she got pregnant, her husband found out about it and he left her and didn't want to have anything to do with her. She gave birth to a little girl. For the next 18 years she raised that little girl until that little girl was an adult. Her daughter then ended up meeting a young man, falling in love, got married. Not long after she was married, she got pregnant, she had a baby and two months after the baby was born, they were in a terrible car accident and both her daughter and her son-in-law were killed and she was left to raise her granddaughter. You think you've had a hard life. This woman had a horrible life. It was written all over her face.

Eventually during that particular time, the wall came down. Everybody in East Germany flooded into West Germany because that's where all the money was. And she located right in the area of Cologne and her granddaughter began attending the church that I was speaking in and through that, her granddaughter comes to Christ. She starts going home and saying to grandma, "Grandma, come to church with me." "Not interested." "Come on, grandma, come to church with me." "Not interested. Gave up on church and God and everything a long time ago. Not interested." Persistent little granddaughter, "Come on, grandma, you've got to go to church with me." "Alright, I'll go to church with you once. Once. But I don't want you to bother me about this anymore." And she goes to church and in that one occasion, God melts her hard heart and she comes to Christ. That was just a few months before we showed up.

Now, you've got to understand as I sat here for an hour and a half and I listened to her story, there's a lot more to that story. I'm in my mind, after so many years of counseling, I'm just enumerating all the different issues in this woman's life I need to address. We're going to be here until 5 o'clock in the morning. I can't do this. This is going to take too long. And I noticed that she had a little Bible and I said, "Would you take your Bible?" In fact, put a little marker here, Hebrews 12, we're going to come back here in just a moment. Let's go over to Romans 8. I took her over to Romans 8:1. She couldn't find

Romans so my translator, Martin, had to help her find Romans in her German Bible. And I said, "I want you to read this out loud. 'There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.'" And I asked her, "Do you know who wrote that?" She said, "No." I said, "A man by the name of Paul wrote that. Do you know who Paul is?" And she said, "No." She said, "Kind of. A little bit." I said, "Aside from being an apostle of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul participated actively before he was a Christian in the murder of Christians." I said to her, "A murderer is writing these words. A murderer. 'There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.'" And she looked at me and she looked at her Bible, and then she looked at me again and the tears started flooding down her face and she looked at her Bible again and I said, "Now, I want to explain to you what this really means." And so I explained it to her and I said, "Listen, I want you to go home tonight, I want you to commit this to memory," which was a tall order for her at her age, "and I want you to come back tomorrow and I want you to be able to quote this verse to me and I want you to be able to explain to me what that means in relationship to your life. Are you willing to do that?" And she said, "Yes." So we had prayer with her. It had been pouring rain all day that day so we made sure...she had walked several blocks in order to come to that meeting so we made sure she had a ride home that night.

The next day I saw Martin in the church foyer and I said, "Martin, have you seen our lady?" And he said, "No," and just then she comes bursting through the doors of the church with the biggest toothless grin you ever saw, like this, moving about as fast as a 75-year-old woman can move. And she shows up and I said, "Martin, ask her to quote the verse." And he says, "She already did." I said, "Well, how did she do?" "Well, she quoted it perfectly." I said, "Well, ask her to explain what does that mean in relationship to her life." And she looked at me with tears in her eyes again and she said, "All the guilt that I've had for the last 55 years and carried is gone. It's gone. All the weight of that guilt is gone." I said, "Where is it?" And she said, "Jesus Christ took it. 'There is no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus.'" I said, "Yup, that's it."

Two years later I was back in the same area and I saw the pastor of her church and I said to him, "I want to know how So-and-so is doing. How is she doing?" "Oh," he said, "great." I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "Well, you know, when we have church dinners," and they had a big church with a big basement area where they did these dinners, he says, "she does the dinners for our church." I said, "You mean with the women?" "No, no, she does the dinners." This was a church of around 500 people. She would on her own do the entire church dinners for the entire church and that was her ministry. That's what she did. I said, "Well, you know where she learned to do that was in those Soviet gulags, right?" He said, "Oh yeah, I know, but she doesn't let any of the rest of the women in the kitchen. She does it all herself." And that's her ministry. That's how she ministers to everybody in that church.

Let's go back to Hebrews 12. You say, "Okay, I understand, but you still haven't answered the question: is God punishing me?" Well, let's take a look at verse 7 very carefully. He says, "It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" Now, there are four

things I want you to understand about this and it would be very good for you to write these down. You're going to need these some day either for yourself or for someone else; at some particular point, you will need these. 1. I want you to understand: I must view hardship as God's discipline. I must view hardship as God's discipline. That's verse 7. In fact, one of the ways that you could translate this verse legitimately is that, "we are to endure hardship as God's discipline." That's one of the ways you could translate that verse, "we can endure hardship as God's discipline." So I have to view hardship as God's discipline in my life. Now, why is that so important? Because that is the way in which God works in our lives.

Put a marker here again, let's go back to Deuteronomy 8, and we are interested in verse 2. Deuteronomy 8:2, it says, "And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart." Stop there. God tested the people of Israel when he took them into the wilderness. We all know that, we understand that, but he explains why he did it, he did it to humble them, right? And he says, "to test you to know what was in your heart." Now, most Christians read this as if he tested them so that God would know what was in their heart. That's not true at all. That's not the reason why he tested them. God already knew what was in their hearts. He is sovereign. There is nothing that he doesn't know. He didn't test them so that he would know what's in their hearts, he tested them so that they would know what's in their hearts. That's a key thing. We think we know what's in our hearts, right? We believe we know what's in our hearts but we really don't know what's in our hearts until all of a sudden the pressure is turned up in our life and the hardship comes into our life and then all of a sudden things start to come out of our heart and we say, "I can't believe that I said that. I can't believe that I did that. But that's who I truly am on the inside, everything else is just the respectable image that I project to everybody else."

But it is when the pressure is turned up, it's when our hearts are squeezed that these things come out. Sometimes I use that illustration all the time in counseling, I'll say to a person, "If I have a sponge in my hand and I hold it out over the Bible and I squeeze that sponge and my Bible gets really wet, why is the Bible wet?" They roll their eyes and go, "Well, you think I'm stupid, right? It's wet because you squeezed the sponge." I'll say to them, "No, that's not the reason why it's wet. The reason why it's wet is because that sponge is full of water. That's the reason why it's wet." The reason why bad things come out of your mouth when the pressure is turned up in your life, the reason why you get so hateful and angry is because that is pre-existent in your heart and the pressure of life brings it out and then you explode and then you sin all over the place and you go, "That's me. That's me."

I like ordering tea in restaurants and do you ever do that in a restaurant and they bring out these big boxes of all these different kinds of teas? I always tell the waitress how unpatriotic she is. The only kind of tea that was in the Boston Harbor was black tea. It was the only kind of tea. All the other stuff is just unpatriotic, alright? No herbal teas were in the Boston Harbor or anything like that. The only thing that I want is black tea. That's all I want is black tea. How do you know whether or not, when they bring all that

tea out to you, whether or not that tea is any good? You can look at it and see who manufactured it and you can smell the tea bag. You don't know whether it's good until what? You stick it into hot water, right? God does that with your life. He takes your life and he puts it into hot water to show you what's on the inside. He takes you through that. He takes you through hard times to show you yourself.

Notice he says at the end of verse 2, he says, "whether you would keep his commandments or not." God took the children of Israel through the wilderness experience to show them their own hearts. Verse 3 again, the second time he says this, "And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you." He takes you through, this is the way our God works, he takes you through really hard times to show you what's in your heart, where do you stand with him.

Go to Proverbs 17, look at Proverbs 17. We are interested in verse 3. This is the way our Lord works. "The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the LORD tests hearts." The Lord is the crucible. The Lord is the furnace. Our hearts are what is put in the furnace to show its genuineness. That's the way that God works.

Let's go back to Psalm 119. Look at this carefully and we're interested in verse 67. Psalm 119:67, "Before I was afflicted," the Psalmist says, "I went astray, but now I keep your word." In other words, it has, these difficulties, these afflictions that come into our life, have a purifying effect upon our life. Then look at verse 71, "It was good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn your statutes." I wasn't really teachable until you brought the affliction into my life, now I'm teachable. I'm listening to you. Parents understand that one. Kids don't listen until you get real serious and start to discipline, all of a sudden they are very attentive. "It was good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn your statutes."

Look at verse 73, "Your hands made me," you know, that's Hebrew past tense, in other words, that's what he did in the past. "Your hands made me," and then he changes tense, "and fashions me," that's Hebrew imperfect, that means, he continues to fashion me; he made me but he continues to fashion me, "give me your understanding that I may learn your commandments." He made me but he continues to work on me. That is what we call in theology progressive sanctification. God continues to do that.

Now, fasten your seatbelts and put your crash helmets on. Are you ready? Verse 75, "I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me." We have a tendency to think that God is being unfaithful when he afflicts us. No, no, no, he is being faithful when he afflicts us. He is being faithful. But you say, "Yeah, but that hurts! You don't understand how it hurts!" All discipline seems painful.

Look at verse 92, "If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction." I would have perished. I would have been crushed by it. If I hadn't stayed true

and focused on what God's word said in the midst of the difficulty and trial that I was going through, it would have crushed me but it's the word of God that made the difference. Now I understand God's strength and his grace.

Let's go back to Hebrews 12:7, we already saw I must view hardship as God's discipline. That's the first thing I've got to accept. I've got to view all hardship, no matter how little, no matter how great that hardship may be, I have to view that as God's discipline in my life. That's really key. But you say, "Okay, I understand but you still haven't answered the question: is God punishing me?" Well, hang on. Let's go to verse 8, "If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?" So number 1: I must view all hardship as God's discipline in my life; but number 2, listen to this: when God brings hardship into my life, he's acting as a loving Father. When God brings hardship into my life, he's acting as a loving Father. That's really important because truly loving fathers make life hard on their kids sometimes. I know that from a kid's perspective, that's not loving. From a kid's perspective, "You make life easy for me." That's what grandfathers are supposed to do. "You make life easy for me," and everything is supposed to be great. No, a father who truly loves their kids are going to bring hardship into those kids' lives. That's part of their maturing process. We're not talking about abusive fathers. We're not talking about that. We're not talking about fathers that misuse their children. We're not talking about that. That's not what he's referring to. He's referring to genuinely loving fathers who care about the long-term welfare of their children, they bring discipline into their children's lives.

That's the way God is. You're one of his, at least you claim to be, so that means he's going to bring affliction and hardship. The question is not: why me? The question is: why not me? The question is not: why me? Why is this going on with me? That's not the question. If he is truly a loving father, it's an assumption, things are going to be hard, life is going to be tough sometimes, not all the time. Ecclesiastes 7:14 says, "When times are good, be happy. When times are bad, consider God has made the one as well as the other." He has done both. God has brought that into your life.

When God brings hardship into my life, he's acting as a loving Father. I mean, a coach will do that, right? With a football team, with a soccer team, with a swim team. Why does that coach run that team? Why does that coach make that team lift weights? Why does that coach make that team swim those laps until they feel like their arms and their legs are going to fall off? Why do they do that? Because he just hates them. He loves to see them suffer. No, it's not the reason why he does it. It's because he wants them to function as a good team on the day that the game is played. He wants them to do that and so in a similar way, God becomes like our coach who takes us through hardship and difficulty and affliction so that on game day we will perform right. When is game day? Any time you encounter the world. Any time you encounter the world is game day. Any time you walk out those doors, you walk into the mission field. It's game day.

God takes you through hardship, loss, affliction, trials. When he does that, he's acting as a loving Father who disciplines children. Now, sometimes even the best intentioned father doesn't discipline their child correctly but God is perfect. That means all of his discipline, all the affliction that we go through, is perfectly suited for us. My daughter will probably acknowledge to you that there are times that I punished her and she didn't deserve the punishment. I thought she did but she didn't deserve it because I'm not omniscient, I'm not omnipotent, I'm not omnipresent but God is. He knows you and he knows your heart better than you know you. You think you know you but you don't know you and so he brings these things in, these difficulties and these afflictions into your life, they are specifically crafted for your life in order to bring about, what? Payment for sin? Is God punishing me?

You say, "Okay, I understand so far. First I've got to view all hardship as God's discipline. Secondly, when God brings hardship into my life he's acting as a loving Father. But you still haven't really answered the question: is God punishing me?" Alright, now we get to verse 10, "For they," that is, human fathers, "disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them," they did the best they could, "but he disciplines us for our good," that's because he's perfect, "so that we may be punished for our sins." No, no, no. Wait a minute, that's not what it says, "so that we may share in his holiness." So number 1: I have to view all hardship as God's discipline; number 2: when God disciplines me, he's acting as a loving Father; number 3, listen to this: this discipline is not punitive, it's corrective, that is, to bring about greater holiness in my life. This punishment or this discipline, I should say, is not punitive, it is corrective in order to bring about greater holiness in my life. Now, that's really key. What we're saying is this: that if you really believe that you're being punished and you're having to pay for your sins that you've committed in the past, then you are no better than a Roman Catholic, you're no better than all the cults in the world because they pay for their own sins. That's why you have to say so many Hail Mary's. That's the reason why you have to pray the rosary. Why? Because you have to add to what Jesus did on the cross your own sufferings in order to completely pay for the sin. Now it's fully paid for. But that's not what the Bible teaches. When Christ died on the cross, all of our sins were paid for. Past, present, future, it's all taken care of. There is nothing left that needs to be paid for. So then why do I go through affliction? In order to bring about greater holiness in my life. That's the reason.

Go back to Hebrews 10 and we're interested in verse 10. Notice this, the writer of Hebrews has already established this as a fact. He says, "And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Once for all. That is a complete atoning sacrifice that pays for all of our sins. Look at verse 12, "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God." For all time. Look at verse 14, "For by a single offering," not repeated offerings, not going back to Masses, not saying Hail Mary's or not saying the rosary. No, no, a single offering, that is, Christ's death on the cross, "he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified." You're starting to see a theme going on here. Christ has paid for all of your sins. You're not paying for anything. It has already been paid for. All of your sins have already been atoned for on the cross. That's what we call the substitutionary sacrifice of sin on the cross, that Christ took our sins upon him, past,

present and future, it is all done with. I am not being punished for anything. I am being disciplined for the purpose of holiness.

I am being disciplined for the purpose of holiness. If I was really paying for my sin, if that was really true, then I'd be in hell. You say, "Well, you don't know my life. My life is a hell." And I'll say, "No, no, no, you don't know hell. You don't know hell." Your life may be hard, I don't take away from that, your life may be full of misery, heartache, difficulty, constant pain, physical suffering, all of that may be true and it may seem like hell but you don't know hell. Hell is unimaginably worse. If God was being punitive, we would be in hell, but he's not being punitive, he's being corrective. He's being corrective. That's really key.

So number 1: I have to view hardship as God discipline; number 2: when God brings hardship into my life, he's acting as a loving Father; number 3: this discipline is not punitive, it's corrective in order to bring about greater holiness in my life. But there's one last thing, it has to do with how do I know if it has worked? We always want to know that, don't we? "Has it worked, Lord? Has it worked?" That's what we want to always know. "I mean, how much more of this do you have planned for me here?" Well, look at verse 11. Verse 11 now says this, Hebrews 12, "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant," and all God's people said, amen. It's hard. It's hard. "But," he says, "later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have paid for their sins." No, "the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Trained. Affliction and hardship and difficulties are spiritual training.

So number 1: I must view hardship as God's discipline; number 2: when God brings hardship into my life, he's acting as a loving Father; number 3: this discipline is not punitive, it is corrective in order to bring about greater holiness in my life; and number 4, listen: I'll know when this hardship has done its job because my heart will be at peace. Look at that. I'll know when this hardship has done its job because my heart will be at peace. You'll no longer be fighting God. "Oh Lord, why am I going through this?" There will be no more anxiety; there is no more struggle with why I'm going through such difficult times. I'm no longer fighting him. My heart is okay. That doesn't mean that the hardship is gone, it means my heart is okay with it. It's okay. I trust my loving Father. I trust him. I trust him. My heart is at peace. There is no angst. There is no worry. There is no anxiety. There is no fear. All of those things are the opposite to peace. I'm okay. I'm okay in my heart even though the hardship is still going on.

I mentioned during the first hour that my wife just in the last couple of weeks has found out that her younger sister has an incurable inoperable brain tumor, cancer, the worst cancer that you can get and it's the worst form of that cancer you can get. You can't get any worse than that. No treatments are available for it. She only has a few days to live but I see, as hard as that is for my wife, her heart is at peace with that. It's okay. It's alright.

Jonathan Edwards, America's greatest theologian, while he was the President of the college in New Jersey which later on became Princeton University, he passed away, somewhat from a human perspective prematurely on March 22, 1758, during about the

same time that Catherine the Great took over Russia, and upon his death, his grieving widow, and she dearly loved her husband, Sarah Pierpont Edwards wrote these words to her daughter after the death of her husband, her dearly beloved husband. She said this, "What shall I say? A holy and good God has covered us with a dark cloud. Oh, that we may kiss the rod and lay our hands on our mouths. The Lord has done it but my God lives and he has my heart and we are all given to God." Can you say that? When you have gone through a tragic loss, can you turn around and kiss the rod that just came across your back? Can you do that? Charles Spurgeon said this, "I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages." Kiss the wave that has just thrown me against the rocks. Can you say that? Until you can say that, then your heart will continually be fighting with God. It will not be at peace. You'll not trust a loving Father and what he's doing in your life.

"Is God punishing me?" No, he's not punishing you. Your sins have already been paid for on the cross of Jesus Christ. It is all done. What is he doing? He has determined to make you into the image of Jesus Christ. He has determined to make you holy and he is taking you through that in order to make you holy.

One of the sweetest women we ever knew, she chaired our deaconesses at our church, her name was Sue Walters, died of cancer, breast cancer, and the day she died, my privilege as a pastor was to walk her into heaven, one of those most memorable times. She had blood coming out of her eyes and blood coming out of her ears, blood coming out of her mouth, and we were singing hymns and praising God right into heaven. Right into heaven. Her husband was not a believer, a couple of her kids were not believers, her dying wish was that they come to Christ. Can you be that at peace with what God is doing? Sue was at peace. She was okay. She understood. She trusted God right to her dying breath on earth. She trusted God. You're going to constantly fight God until you surrender to a loving Father.

Let's bow for prayer.

Father, you've taught us a very valuable lesson today and that is you are a God who will take us through hardship, difficulties, trials and loss in our life in order to help us understand our own hearts, in order to teach us to trust you and to trust your word, to listen to you, to follow you, and until we do, we will fight you; we'll get angry, we'll get upset, we'll succumb to worry and fear and deep anxiety and panic. But the Christian who fully and completely trusts the Lord realizes this is meant for their holiness and this actually becomes an occasion for great growth in their life and they become tremendous testimonies for Jesus Christ where other people will ask for a reason for the hope that they have. I pray, Father, that you will raise up an army of believers here at Providence who will have that kind of faith that will shine clearly and confidently for Jesus Christ and this we pray in his name. Amen.