

“Knowing God’s Love Through Suffering”  
Hebrews 12:5–7  
Dr. Tom Hawkes  
September 10, 2023 • Sunday Morning Sermon

My relationship with Briarwood Presbyterian Church goes back many years. About 38 years ago I was interviewing for a job with the Presbyterian Church in America to work with the home mission board in North America. I was being interviewed by two people, Dr. Phil Clark, who was the director of Mission to North America and then some small country pastor from Alabama by the name of Frank Barker who was the pastor of Briarwood Presbyterian Church. Halfway through about a four-hour interview we broke for lunch and I called my wife, Anne, and said, “I thought it was an important job, but it can't be that important because the other guy interviewing me is from some small country church in Alabama. He's very quiet and unassuming man. I mean, he couldn't have a congregation of more than 50, 60, maybe 100 people at most.” Shows what a good judge of character I was 38 years ago. As a young hotshot, when we continued the interview, I decided to turn the interview around on my interviewees. I said to them “What kind of man are you looking for?” And I can remember as though it were yesterday, Dr. Barker looking down, coming up and going, ‘I reckon you.’ I got the job and began working to help train church planters for the PCA and that's where I came to first know, Dr. Harry Reeder

Harry was one of our trainers. I knew him just as a brilliant, heartfelt trainer who had such an impact on the lives of the church planter pastors all across this denomination. Then in 1991, my wife and I moved to Charlotte. I was working there for another ministry and we became members at Christ Covenant Church. So I had the joy of sitting under Harry's preaching and Dr. John Haynes worship leadership. Dr. Reeder baptized our three oldest boys on actually the same Sunday that John Haynes' children were baptized. Then in 1994, we stepped forward to launch out Christ Covenant's first Church plant in downtown Charlotte. I had Harry, then as my church planting coach and knowing him in a whole new light as a pastor to me and saw how great he was at that. He was an excellent pastor, a pastor of pastors, and exceptional in new categories. There is sorrow for his loss yet joy to be with Briarwood. It is a delight to open God's Word with you with a hope that will be of some encouragement to you.

So now let us turn our attention to God's Word. Hebrews 12:5-7 says [5] *And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. [6] For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives.” [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?* This is the word of the Lord.

Prayer:

Father, we do thank You for the gift of Your Word for without it, we would stumble through this world as in darkness, but with it, it is a light to our feet and a lamp to our path and You do guide us so well. With Your Word we ask that You would add the gift of your Holy Spirit and that He would come into our lives and soften our hearts and quicken our minds that we might understand and embrace Your Word for us for this we ask in Your Name and for Your glory, Jesus. Amen.

Some years ago, there was a bad bus wreck in downtown London. Not long after the wreck where so many people were killed, pundits started talking about the theological implications of this and people said, “How can there be a good God in a world where things like this happen?” An Anglican priest rightly stood to the Lord's defense and said ‘The horror of the

crash to a Christian confirms the fact that we live in a world of real values. If the universe was just electrons, there would be no problem of evil or suffering.’ Reading that account in the newspaper, Richard Dawkins, the scientist and atheist, wrote a response to rebut it. Dawkins said, “On the contrary, if the universe were just electrons, some people are going to get hurt. Other people are going to get lucky and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.”

There are moments when we suffer as children of the Lord where we're tempted to think that Dawkins may be right. It seems like pitiless indifference. It seems to be accidental to us. This passage in all of God's Word tells us that that is untrue. The truth is that God superintends everything that happens in this world through His providence, and He does so for His own glory, but for the good of His children as well. As we look at this text, I want us to ask a very simple question and that is, how can we know God's love through suffering? I was talking to a pastor friend yesterday on the drive up here. I told him my topic and told him that question. He said, “I don't know how we can know God's love apart from suffering.” I want to make two major points in this study. Number one, understand that suffering is God's loving discipline for our good. Before we can know God's love in the midst of suffering, we have to understand that all suffering is God's discipline meant for our good. Second, we'll talk about how we have to experience it that way as well.

Suffering is not accidental, but lovingly intentional. Part of what makes suffering for Christians, particularly in the United States so difficult, is there's a lot of bad theology out there and we've been infected by it. The American civil religion, in which its primary premise goes something like this – if you're basically a good person, then God will do good things for you. It's a very simple religion, not the religion of the Bible and so when something bad happens to us, we become confused and think ‘Wait a minute. I'm a basically good person, and so I should be getting basically good things. Why do I have to suffer? They told me when I became a Christian that Jesus would solve all my problems. What about this?’

When we feel the suffering, and conclude it's not from God, we're totally off base with what God wants us to understand. So, we may think thoughts like this when cancer comes to us – “it's just the bad genes or is the bad food or too much sun.” Or when a relationship goes wrong, we think, it just comes from their sin. It's the spouse – the husband, the wife – this rebellious child that the Lord gave me. That's my problem. We have a financial problem and we might say “it's the bad company I work for or the bad economy in this country.’ When we lose someone, we say “A disease took them too soon.” But God's Word here tells us something very different from this about our suffering.

Hebrews 12:6 says [6] *For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives.*” That is the key message for us today. Our loving Heavenly Father brings suffering to our life because He loves us. It's from His loving hand. It's not random. It has very much God's intention and all that He does. To be a Christian is to suffer discipline for one reason – the Father loves us. The word discipline here in the Greek means all the training of a child, not just the chastisement, not just the rod, but all the training that goes into the work of raising a child into a grown man or a grown woman. You could well translate this passage to say, ‘the Lord trains the one He loves.’ It's true about good fathers. They train the one that they love. When you're at a restaurant seeing a five-year-old child running around the restaurant screaming, yelling and turning things over, and his father is sitting there casually eating his own meal, you don't think to yourself, “O, what a loving dad.” No, you think, “what a jerk.” We recognize that lack of training does not show love and that the one who loves his son trains his son.

The training of suffering is painful for us. The word chastises in this verse is fairly different from the word training or discipline. The ESV usually just translates to the word chastise as flog – to flog someone. The same word is used in John 19:1 which says [1] *Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged Him*. It simply means just to disgorge, to beat. So when God chastises us, He trains us. It is painful. It's meant to be, not ultimately to harm us, but ultimately to help us, to heal us, to be trained by Him and the long term.

John Calvin, writes, “The taste of God's love towards us cannot be had by us under chastisement except we be fully persuaded that there are fatherly scourges by which He chastises us.” This is a vital Biblical truth, and I'm sure this is something you already know so I'm just reminding you of something that the Lord wants us to get over and over and over again – the Lord discipline someone He loves and it's painful when it's happening. It's not supposed to feel like butterflies and rainbows. Hebrews 12:11 says [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*. It is painful rather than pleasant but there is a redemptive purpose behind it, redemptive for us personally and redemptive for the Kingdom of God as it moves forward all around us.

Eugene Peterson writes ‘Suffering is not evidence of God's absence, but of God's presence and it is in our experience of being broken that God does His surest and most characteristic salvation work.’ Pastor Randy Alcorn, in his book God Is Good, tells the story of his friend Ethel Hare. Ethel had had a double mastectomy fighting cancer and was cleared for cancer for a while, but then it came back with a vengeance. One of her friends asked her, “How do you feel about God now?” Ethel said ‘God has made Himself increasingly real and precious to me. He has given to me joy, such as I've never known before, and I've no need to work at it. It just comes even amidst the tears. It has taught me that no matter how good my genes are and how well I take care of my diet myself, He will lead me on whatever journey He chooses and He will never leave me for a moment of that journey.’ God is good no matter what the diagnosis is, or the *prognosis* is.

If we fail to understand suffering as God's loving discipline, then we don't endure it well and we tend to focus on the secondary means by which the Lord is bringing the suffering into our lives and we tend to target that. ‘It's their fault. That's why it's happening to me.’ As we read the Scriptures, we come to understand that God has many reasons behind suffering in the life of His people. You'll find about a dozen different reasons if you study the Scriptures on this and they can be categorized into four broad categories generally speaking. The first of those reasons is to display God's glory in us. God wants to display His glory in us and through us as we suffer faithfully. The second reason is to deploy us, to send us out for the advance of His kingdom. The disciples were gathered in Jerusalem, worshiping, having a great time and then persecution came not because they were sinning, but because God wanted to scatter them across the Mediterranean so His church would go forward. Thirdly, He also has a suffer to develop to make us more humble, more teachable, to draw us closer to His side, to know us better, for us to become more dependent upon Him. Fourthly, we suffer as He disciplines us, to correct us for a particular sense. We see this in the life of King David, who sinned with Bathsheba, and the costs with the life of his firstborn son. The Scripture tells us the thing that David did displeased the Lord.

As we go through suffering in this world, we have to remember there are many reasons that the Lord has us suffering but only one of those is for particular sin. Most of our suffering won't be for a corrective for a particular sin. But what the passage tells us is whatever the reason behind it, it is for our good and we should endure it as discipline. Hebrews 12:7 says [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?* We have to endure discipline because the Lord means it to be training, not punishment, in our lives. When we understand this, we can know His love even in the midst of suffering. John Calvin says ‘everyone who knows and is persuaded that he is chastised by God must immediately be led to this thought that he is chastised because he is loved by God.’ That’s what our passage tells us. The Lord disciplines the one He loves.

Not only must we understand that suffering is the loving intent of God, but secondly suffering is not destructive, but lovingly constructive. One of the other lies that our culture in this world, the devil tell us, is that suffering is purely bad. It is purely destructive. If your suffering, it will just destroy your life. It’s bad for you because it hurts but God tells us otherwise. Again, Hebrews 12:11 says *[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.* God only allows suffering in our lives for our good from His love. There is no meaningless suffering in this world for those who follow Jesus Christ, it is not possible. There is no trial meant to destroy us, no disease is meant to take us away from Christ. Suffering is not God’s hatred, it is His love. The message of Romans 8:28 says *[28] And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.*

As we think about suffering this world, it is good to recognize and to acknowledge that those secondary sources bringing us suffering may in fact intend to harm us. Our Father doesn’t, but our enemies may well mean to do that. The unfaithful friend wants to hurt you when he stabs you in the back. The rebellious child that looks at his mom and says, ‘I hate you. means to stab her in the heart. The unkind boss who has given you a hard time means to destroy your career and the devil wants to use all the challenges in this world – diseases, injury, relational tension – to discourage us, as he did with Job, but what we need to see in Scripture is what we must see in Scripture is that God is bigger than all of those secondary means. He is bigger than the bad genes, than the friends who betray us, than the child who rebels against us. His attention behind suffering in your life is not to harm you, but to do you good.

When you suffer your loving Heavenly Father means to help you. This is the message of Jeremiah 29:11, where our Lord says to us, *[11] For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.* You may know this the word welfare. There’s the Hebrew word Shalom which is usually translated peace, but means much more than just a simple word peace. It means wholeness, fullness, joy. My plans for you are shalom even behind this suffering.

Now, it’s true that whenever we face suffering, it just feels destructive. It does hurt. It is painful but the Lord’s intention behind it, no matter what anyone else intends towards us, are good. He’s developing us, deploying us, displaying us, disciplining us. God’s intentions behind discipline is not punitive. Punishment in this world has one of two different meanings and directions. There is punishment that is meant to be punitive to exact a price for past behavior. There’s a punishment, a discipline that’s meant to be developmental for training. So, when a judge passes sentence on a criminal, what often has said is that you owe a debt to society. When a criminal comes out of jail, they say he’s paid his debt to society. It’s a punitive form of punishment but when a father disciplines his child, it’s not to exact a price from that child. It is to train them in godliness for the future. So, God gives Fatherly discipline to train us out of His love.

I understand that that training, that discipline does not feel like love as it comes. Our suffering hurts. The very first funeral I attended as a child, as a young teen, was my own sister

who was killed by a drunk driver. The very first funeral I ever performed was my own father's, the second, my mother's. So, my wife has suffered terribly from many different categories. My children have suffered all that is pain for me. I have been betrayed and attacked by people I've loved and served so many times that I've lost count and I won't even try to count them. As true for all pastors, I've held the hands of those who are going through death, despair, depression and disease. I get it. I know that it never feels like it's constructive when we suffer. It feels as though our life is just being torn apart but we have to let our hearts and our emotions be educated by God's Word. Let His Word sink down to a point where it really grabs hold of our heart and soul and we believe it when the Lord says 'the Lord disciplines the one He loves.'

This does not mean we pretend to be stoics. 'Oh, I've got cancer. Great. Wife's leaving me. Wonderful.' That's not right. We're not blocks of wood. When the Lord brings us to a school of suffering, we cry out to Him and it's right to cry out to Him in the midst of suffering. Read through the Psalms. It's an entire book of God's people crying out in the midst of suffering and pain but we're returned to this truth again and again. God in His love is building us up. Again, Hebrews 12:11 says *[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.*

Think of Joseph in the Bible and his suffering. He was about 17 years old when his brothers, out of envy, hatred and jealousy, sold him into slavery. They owed him brotherly fidelity, they owed him love, protection, but wanting him dead they sold him into slavery. He served faithfully as a slave to Potiphar and Potiphar's wife, attacked him and falsely accused him so he was thrown into prison. In prison Joseph helps different people there, including the cup bearer to the King, who forgets about him until two years later and then remembers, "Oh, yeah, I was supposed to tell you about this guy in prison who can interpret dreams. He might be someone who could help you." Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams, and he goes from being a prisoner to being second in command of all of Egypt. He's about 39 years old, when his brothers appear before him in Egypt and they are restored. Years pass and then after their father, Jacob, dies, their brothers fear now that their younger brother will finally get revenge so they come before him, pleading for mercy.

Joseph suffered about 13 years in slavery and prison and served 26 years leading Egypt, as second in command. He's about 56 years old when his brothers come before him and say, 'please don't hold this against us.' Then we come to where Joseph utters that amazing statement in Genesis 50:20 which says, *[20] As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.* He is basically saying, "I get it. What you did to me that was really evil. You didn't want my good at all. You meant to destroy me, to kill me, to get me out of your lives. Potiphar's wife meant me no good. The cup bearer forgot about me. He should have remembered me. All of you did me harm, but not my God. My God was above it all and His intention superseded your intentions. He meant to shape me into the man I am today. You see before you, not the boy you sent away to bring me to this place I am today that I might save through His grace many lives.' When we come to understand what Joseph understood, it changes the way we see suffering. We know then that God disciplines the one He loves.

Then we know God's love in the very midst of suffering. Our suffering is not random. It is not accidental. It cannot be. In a universe controlled by the providence of a loving God it can't be an accident. The suffering, this trial is proof of one thing. He loves me. Some years ago, my wife and I were teaching a parenting class at our church in Charlotte, and on nearly the last day of class, one of our sons was home from college. At this time he was 18 and I said, 'Why don't

you sit in on the class and maybe there'll be a Q&A and people might have something they want to ask you.' Sure enough, someone wanted to ask him a question. The question was, "What's the most important lesson that you learned in the midst of your parents' discipline that we should learn?" I was shaking in my shoes. He said, "honestly, every time my mother or my father disciplined, I was absolutely sure of one thing. They made it very clear they loved me." When you discipline your children, make sure they know you love them.

Do you know this about your Father's discipline that every time He loves you? Our question today is how can we know God's love through suffering? Our first point is we have to understand that suffering is God's loving discipline for us. Secondly, we have to experience suffering as God's loving discipline for our good. Embrace your suffering as God's discipline. Once our theology is right, we come to understand what the Bible says about suffering in our lives and we need to get our practice right – orthodoxy and orthopraxy as well. We can begin to embrace God's training. We are to embrace our suffering as loving discipline rather than running away from it.

Now to Hebrews 12:5 which says [5] *And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him.* There are two ways were to respond to the loving discipline of our Father. One, don't regard it lightly and two don't become weary.

How do we regard lightly the discipline of the Lord? It does even sound like it's possible. Does it? Here's how we regard it lightly – when we miss that it is his discipline. When we think, 'Oh, it's just this bad boss, you gave me. Oh, it's just this cancer that you allowed me to have. That's what's really causing my pain.' We fail to see our loving Father behind it all. We don't see the Divine weight when we take seriously suffering as God's loving discipline. Then we embrace it and we begin to ask in the midst of it, "Father, what do you want me to do? How am I supposed to respond in this instance? What does it look like for me to walk with You? How should I treat the people who are hurting me, the doctor that miss diagnosed me?" Those are the right questions to ask.

Notice I didn't ask why. We always want the big why behind it all. We think God wants us to understand the cosmic why, but what He wants us to do is to follow Him through the midst of it. I had the privilege of writing my doctoral dissertation on Sanctification and Calvin. I spent eight years studying and writing that. Shortly after I finished it, one of my business friends who was sort of a bottom line person said, "Can you sum up your eight years in like one sentence?" I thought, 'Really, you want me to do that? That's impossible' but then the Lord brought to mind a statement of Calvin's that would come up again and again. The statement is this; 'Submit to God in difficult Providences.' That has become a life lesson for me. Probably the pastoral advice I have given most often. "Lord, you want me to fight cancer? Okay, I'll do it. How do you want me to fight it? Lord, You want me to have a rebellious child? Okay. How do I lead him or her? What do you want me to do? How do you do that?" Faithfully.

We're not supposed to get a big why behind it. We get the what and the how of what we're supposed to do. That's what we're looking for. The why is it for us to get. Deuteronomy 29:29 says [29] *The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, (why?) that we may do all the words of this law.* We are to walk in obedience in the midst of the suffering. J. I. Packer in his great book, Knowing God picks up this very idea, saying that "wisdom is not really understanding the big why behind things. People feel that if they were really walking close to God that He could impart wisdom to them freely, then they would discern the real purpose of everything that happened to them and it

would be clear to them every moment how God was making all things work together for our good.” We don't get mysterious why, the secret will of God. We get His revealed will and we walk in obedience to it. Packer goes on to say, “Wisdom is to confess that He is wise and to cleave to Him and live for Him in light of His Word, through thick and thin.”

We have four grown sons, three of them walking with the Lord and in 2012, one of our sons came to us and told us that he was not a believer. It was a surprise. It was a shock. I remember at one point that night talking to him, I said, “Son, I feel like you deceived us a little bit on this.” He said, “Deceived you, Dad? I flat lied to you a year ago when we were sitting in the same booth at this restaurant and you asked me how my devotional life was, and I told you what I wanted you to hear.” It was devastating to us. He told us on a Friday night, and Saturday in our home it felt as if someone had died. It was exact same feeling that day after a funeral.

Sunday morning, I was trying to prepare to preach and I could not do it. I was trying to practice the sermon. God, I just can't do this. I had to bring my heart to a place where I submitted to God, so I said, “All right, God, you want me to be the pastor, father of an unbelieving son? I will do it. How? What do you want me to do? I haven't done this before. What does it mean to follow You faithfully in the midst of this particular trial?” You can join us in prayer for that son still not a believer today. I know many of you know that sort of sorrow with children and grandchildren have strayed away from the Lord. Rather than rejecting suffering that is too hard, He wants us to embrace it, to submit to Him in the midst of His difficult providence, not knowing the why, knowing the Who, knowing His love and asking Him, ‘What do you want me to do?’ We embrace suffering from God's loving discipline.

Lastly, we endure suffering as God's loving discipline. Hebrews 12:5b says [5b] “*My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him.*” The other problem that he instructs us in here is the reality that suffering is wearisome. Even if we accept on the front end – okay, this is God's discipline – at some point along the way, we get tired of it. We just want to quit. I'm told that the Navy SEALs, in the midst of their SEALs training, have an easy out for those candidates who no longer can endure the physical and mental suffering that they have to go through to become Navy SEALs. There's a bell they can walk up to, ring it three times and on the third ring they're out, no questions asked.

When we suffer, we're often looking for that bell, aren't we? Lord, show me the exit. I just want out. We want to quit. We want to quit emotionally. It's just too hard, Lord, I can't stay engaged. I want to quit relationally. If the trial involves people, we say I'm just going to stay away from them. We want to quit physically. They're physically demanding. I just give up and physically quit. We quit spiritually. Lord, You're the last person I want to talk to about this. You did this to me. But God addresses us as His sons and daughters right here, and says, “Don't grow weary. Don't you ring that bell on Me?” He says, in effect, “Stay in my school, complete My training. It will be amazing how good it is for you. Endure the trial all the way through.”

Hebrews 12:7 says [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?* It is for discipline that you have to endure, that you walk all the way through the trial with the Lord so that His training in us can be complete, we learn to submit to His Word and we suffer the way He wants us to suffer – humbly, teachable, obedient. Are you suffering today? I would encourage you from this very Word of God to endure the suffering. Don't ring the bell. Don't quit. Engage emotionally, relationally, physically, and above all, engage spiritually with the Lord. He means for our suffering to bring us more deeply into His heart. When we do embrace suffering as God's love, when we endure at all His loving correction, then we are better trained by it and we're changed

by it more and more. And without knowing why we're transformed by His loving discipline more into the people He wants us to become. We're transformed more and more into the very image of Jesus Christ and there we know His love in ways that we could not when life was easy and good.

The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 5:3-5 says *[3] Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* Suffering reveals God's love for us, for the Lord disciplines the one He loves. We know His love more and more, and we know Him. In the midst of the suffering, we come to know our Father and we know Jesus too, because right there in the very middle of the suffering we come to see Jesus.

Jesus who suffered for us, his suffering was Redemptive where as our sufferings are redemptive as well but not in the same way His was. I Peter 3:18 says *[18] For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit.* Our suffering is redemptive for it leads us to know Him. I Peter 2:21 says *[21] For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps.* In the midst of suffering, we come to know Jesus in a way we could not have known Him before, in the fellowship of sharing in His suffering.

Paul writes in Philippians in 3:10, *[10] that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death.* Are we like that in the first half of that verse? I want to know Him in the power of His resurrection. Give me victory but you can't have it without the second half of that verse – the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings for there in the midst of those sufferings is the sufferings of Christ in our lives. Broken and weak, helpless, humbled, not knowing what to do, we crawl timidly into our Father's lap and we look up into his eyes and say, “Daddy help!” And He has us right where He wants us, right where He can help us, there in His lap. In the midst of suffering, we come to know His love and we come to know His Son, our brother Jesus, who when He invited us to follow Him, told us very clearly our following Him would include our cross. Jesus says in Matthew 16:24, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.”

We do have a problem with suffering, don't we? Christians around the world look at us here in the United States, and they recognize that we more than they have these theological issues. We tend to think that suffering is only harmful and that it's random. We get suffering all wrong at times when we only want to flee it. But we must come through a text like this to understand this very simple truth – all the suffering that comes in our lives in this world is from God's love and for our good. It changes everything. It changes everything about us, everything that we go through in our suffering. Where do you face suffering right now? Where might you face it in the future? Remember this passage and come back to it again and again. I'm sure it's not the first time you've visited it. As a passage in which we are meant to return, we are to stop and realize God is loving me in the midst of this. He calls us to embrace it and endure it by His help with His power and in the midst of it, to know Him, to know His love in the very nature of our suffering.

Pastor Scott Larson tells the story of a friend of his who discovered God's love right in the midst of her suffering. Annette and her husband had been missionaries in Europe, and they found she had some pain in her lower back. They found a tumor. It was a relatively normal surgery, but something went terribly wrong and she was paralyzed from the waist down, confined to a wheelchair the rest of her life and experiencing intense pain. Scott Larson had been



invited over to their house for dinner one evening and he was wondering what he would find. He writes, ‘What I encountered when I entered their home was a beautifully dressed woman whose outward expression revealed little of her physical pain. During my five-hour visit, Annette served as a gracious hostess who shared her story with honesty. She told how when she first came out of the surgery, she and everyone else focused on praying for God to heal her but that didn't happen and she was confined to 24-hour care at home. She became very depressed.’

Annette shared “I felt that I was left with three choices. One to kill myself and end the unbearable suffering for all of us. Two to abandon my faith in God and merely exist on painkillers, or three, to put my energies to discovering God in the midst of all this suffering.” Larson writes that at the moment she was talking about this, her face absolutely beamed with joy. She continued, “I chose the third, and as I began slowly reading the Bible again through the lens of pain and suffering, what I saw was a God who was familiar with both. I thought my pain and suffering had taken me to a place where God could never be found. Instead, it was a place where He became more real to me than I had ever known Him to be.” That my brother and sisters, is a heart that is learned to submit to God in difficult Providences. It is a heart that has learned that suffering in this life comes from the hand of her loving Father. God disciplines the one He loves. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, this is a phenomenally hard text for us to take in. It is easy for us in the midst of good times with friends and family around us laughing, to think You're a good God and You love me. But Lord, when we stand in cancer wards, or an open grave or stand alone, it's hard for us to believe so we need Your Word all the more to assure us of its truth. The Lord disciplines the one He loves. Father, we believe, help us in our unbelief. Lord, I pray for every man, woman and child reading that You would meet them in the midst of suffering, that You, Jesus, would reveal Yourself that they would know Your love in a depth they have never known before and see that You are a good God. For this we ask in Your Name Jesus, Amen.