

An Encouragement To Persevere

Michael Woody | Hebrews 12:3–11

A Biblical theology of adversity and how we should view times of adversity.

Why This Text?

1. I struggled with the focus of this text:
 - a. Some viewed it as perseverance against sin. That is the view held by Kent Hughes and Richard Phillips, both whom I greatly respect.
 - b. Others viewed it as multi-focused (Matthew Henry, John Owen, Spurgeon) to persevere against persecution, in general
2. In the end I came to the opinion that the focus was multi-focused to persevere against persecution, in general.
3. When we undergo times of adversity, times where God does not answer that prayer the way we desperately wished He would, times of physical weakness and even declining health, times where the pressure of the world seems far more real than the presence of God, we are tempted to believe God is against us.
4. We must come to a Biblical view of discipline:
 - a. discipline is training
 - b. discipline is good
 - c. discipline is beneficial
 - d. discipline is rooted in love
5. The focus of this text is a Biblical theology of adversity and how we should view times of adversity. The author is taking a truth captured in Romans 8:31-39 and applying it to the lives of these Hebrew believers.

What This Text?

The author is giving us a Biblical theology of adversity and how we should view times of adversity. Why should we persevere? The author gives us three reasons why we should persevere:

1. We persevere because of the example of Jesus (v. 3-4)
2. We persevere because God loves us as children (v. 5-11)

We persevere because of the example of Jesus (v. 3-4)

1. Verse 3 links this section to verses 1-2, it is transitional in focus.
 - a. The focus here was to not grow weary
 - b. The focus here was to not become discouraged
2. To consider is to thoughtfully reason - we might use the words “dwell upon” or “consider carefully.”
 - a. Verses 1-2 used the imagery of running a race, these believers were under persecution and they were on the verge of fainting in this race.
 - b. They needed to endure that they might not grow weary and lose heart.
3. Verse 4 links to verse 3 - Jesus suffered to the point of shedding His blood in death; he encourages them that they have not had to go that far yet.
4. Whether the focus is perseverance against indwelling sin, or if the focus is against those who would sinfully oppose us, we are to consider Jesus who both provided an example of perseverance, but who also sustains us in this time.
 - a. This requires us to be singularly focused - we must look unto Jesus. We will be tempted to look at the persecution versus realizing that God is still in control.
 - b. It is like Peter on the Sea of Galilee - he was fine until he took his eyes from Christ and began to consider the waves. Suddenly then, he started sinking.

We persevere because God loves us as His children (v. 5-11)

1. When people go through hardships their first response can be, Why is God punishing me?
 - a. They view the trial as God punishing them.
 - b. They view the trial as God loving them less than He did before.
2. This does not mean that we cannot be chastised by the Lord - such is not God being against us it is actually because God is for us. (v. 5)
 - a. Punishment and chastisement may appear similar in appearance, but they differ in the mind of the punisher and in the relationship of the person who is punished.
 - b. God punishes the sinner on His own account, because He is angry with the sinner. His justice must be avenged, His law must be honored, and His commands must have their dignity maintained.
 - c. God does not punish the believer on His own account; it is on the Christian's account—to do him good. He afflicts him for his profit. He lays on the rod for His child's advantage. He has a good design toward the person who receives the chastisement.
 - d. There are two wrong responses that can occur here: one is making light of what God is doing and the other is giving up.
3. Why should we not make light or give up?
 - a. God loves us and therefore, he disciplines us (v. 6)
 - b. God is dealing with us as sons (v. 7)
 - c. God's discipline shows us to be true, legitimate sons(v. 8-9)
 - d. An example of earthly parents is given (v. 10)
 - e. A honest view of discipline is offered (v. 11)

How Should This Change My Life?

1. When times of difficulty occur, we must find our comfort in the sovereign hand of God and believe He is for us, not against us; we get this because of our relationship to Him. He loves us - For God so loved us that He gave us His Son!
2. When times of difficulty occur, we must recognize that they are not forever. They are called “momentary light afflictions” in 2 Cor. 4:17.
3. When times of difficulty occur, we must recognize that God is producing fruit in us long-term that is worth the momentary light afflictions.