

Psalm 38

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[0 : 00] The wrath of God is already upon us. But putting your faith in Jesus, trusting in his sacrifice, believing that he already paid the price for your sins, removes that wrath.

And you can live your life with the freedom of knowing that judgment day is no thing to fear for you. That the return of Christ is not something to be worried about, but it's nothing but reward and good news for you.

Because Jesus has won the reward in your place. But that doesn't mean that because you've been rescued from the wrath of God that you will never experience God's discipline in this life.

You will. In fact, Andy read from a passage earlier in Hebrews chapter 12 that tells us not only that we will experience God's discipline, but that his discipline in our lives is actually a sign that he loves us.

Listen to this again. I know you've already heard it once, but I want you to hear these words from Hebrews chapter 12 verse 7. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons.

[1 : 17] He's treating you like a son if he's disciplining you. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, and you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Then he goes on to say, Besides, we've had earthly fathers who disciplined us. We respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 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 in his holiness. Now 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.

That God's discipline should come into our life, even when we've been set free from his judgment, is good for us. Because though the penalty of sin has been removed from us through the sacrifice of Christ, still we are sinful people.

Still we say and do dumb things. Still we mistreat people. Still we're not loving to our neighbor. Still we sometimes lie. We still do things.

[2 : 25] We still wrestle and struggle. If you ever talk to a non-Christian and they say, The problem I have with Christians is that they're all hypocrites. That only works if we claim to be without sin.

And I at least don't claim to be without sin. We know that we're still wrestling. We're still fighting with it. We're still struggling with it. And because of that reality, God sometimes comes in to aid us and to help us in our fight against sin by bringing discipline into our lives.

And as the writer of Hebrews says, It's not pleasant at the time, but it is good for us. In fact, that's something else that we need to consider when we think about God's discipline is what is he doing in disciplining us?

What's his purpose? What's his plan in it? Well, we're told right there in Hebrews chapter 12 that he's disciplining us for holiness. And that those who receive God's discipline are being trained for righteousness.

So he has a plan. When he brings hardship into your life in response to your sinful decisions, he actually has a plan for those hardships. He's doing something good in you and through you and for you.

[3 : 42] It doesn't feel like it. I know that. But he's doing something good. He's making you more holy. Or to put it in another way, the way that Paul says it, in Romans chapter 8, he's making you more like Jesus.

He's conforming you to the image of his son. Romans 8, 28 is a verse that we often love to quote when we're dealing with difficult things, where we see the great promise there that God works all

things for good to those who love him or are called according to his purpose.

But the very next verse tells us what's the good that God is doing. If God is working all things, even the tough things that he brings into our lives, if he's working all of those for good, what does that good look like?

Because sometimes the discipline, the thing that he's doing to bring good actually itself feels really bad. So sometimes we wonder, well, what's the good that you're up to?

Well, Paul tells us what it is. He says, for or because all those he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son.

[4 : 57] So the good that God is working in us through all things, even his discipline, is that we would be conformed to the image of Jesus. That you would be made more like Christ.

The hardships that come into your life by the hand of God are all used by him to make you more like Jesus. That's more good news for us.

There's one more thing, one more thing I want to say about God's discipline before we walk our way through David's description. And that is that there are times when we see discipline in someone's life and it's not a result of their sin.

That we should not conclude that all discipline that comes into our lives is a direct product or a direct result of our sin. Because some discipline is correction.

Some discipline does come along after we've messed up and says, you've made a mistake, there are consequences, these consequences come to you as correction for the mistake that you made.

[6 : 07] Much discipline, in fact, for us probably most discipline is that kind. But there is also a discipline that simply comes in the form of training.

It's not a matter of correcting us for a fault that we have or for a stumble that we've made. It's a matter of coming in and training us. That's why the writer of Hebrews can also say in Hebrews 5, verse 8, that Jesus himself learned obedience through what he suffered.

Think about that. Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered. Now, why does Jesus need to learn to obey? Not because he disobeyed and he's being corrected.

That same book, Hebrews says, that Jesus was without sin. He never sinned. And yet, as a human being in his time that he walked upon the earth, God taught and trained him in the school of obedience.

And oftentimes that came through his suffering. He suffered in many, many ways. And the writer of Hebrews says, in every way that we suffer. And through that suffering, even Jesus was being, in a sense, disciplined, that is, trained and taught what obedience is.

[7 : 30] So we can't conclude just because we see trouble in someone else's life, we should not automatically conclude, well, that's clearly God's discipline in the form of correction.

They've sinned and he's fixing that. He's getting them on the right course because they were on the wrong course. That's not always the case. Now, many people assume that. Jesus' own disciples assumed that.

They assumed that if someone had some kind of malady in their life, that it must be God disciplining them or judging them in some sort of way. So that when they were confronted with a man in John, in the Gospel of John, a man who was born blind, they asked Jesus, who sinned?

Was it this man who's blind? Or maybe, was it his parents? Is this punishment for their sin? Who sinned so that he was born blind? And Jesus says, neither. It has nothing to do with that.

And Jesus says that he was born blind so that God might be glorified through him. So that not all hardships that come into our lives are God's correction in response to our sin.

[8 : 41] We want to be really careful as we approach this topic that we don't assume that the things that David is describing in Psalm 38 are universal and cover all of the sufferings that we experience in this life because that's not true.

We want to be careful as we look at others and we see others walking through hard times that we don't say in the back of our minds, well, they must have really messed up in order for God to bring that into their lives.

Maybe, but maybe not. David is not conjecturing about someone else's experience.

He's reflecting upon his own experience. And David makes it really clear that the discipline, the hardships that he endured were, in fact, in direct response to his own sin.

In fact, we can see that in verse 3. he says, there is no health in my bones because of my sin. That's why.

[9 : 43] That's why he's suffering. Because of my sin. And then he goes on. Verse 4, for my iniquities have gone over my head like a heavy burden. They are too heavy for me.

The cause of his suffering was, in fact, his sin that brought God's hand of discipline into his life. Or, you can look further down. Verse 17.

He says, I'm ready to fall. My pain is ever before me. I confess my iniquity. I'm sorry for my sin. So, though not all suffering that comes into our life is God's hand of correcting discipline for us, sometimes it is.

And we should never dismiss the idea that God might have brought something into our life in response to our sin. We shouldn't make the assumption that it is, but we should be willing to examine ourselves, look into our lives, pray, seek God's guidance, seek wisdom that comes from him, to determine, is there some sin that I've committed that has brought this into my life?

David knows that it's his sin that's brought his suffering. And as I said earlier, he describes his suffering in three different ways. He talks first off about physical torment that he endured.

[11 : 08] That yes, sometimes our suffering can actually come in the form of physical pain. Again, we shouldn't assume that because someone's sick it's because they sinned. But sickness can come into our lives or pain or injury can come into our lives and we need to at least pause to ask the question, is there something that I need to repent of?

Is this God's correction coming into my life right now? Listen to what David says. Two times he says, there is no soundness in my flesh.

In fact, it kind of bookends this section on his physical suffering. It's there in verse 3 and then it's again in verse 7, there is no soundness in my flesh. And everything in between those two statements is a description of the physical pain that he's enduring.

So he goes on. He says, there is no health in my bones because of my sin. Verse 5, my wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness.

I am utterly bowed down and prostrate all the day I go about mourning for my sides are filled with burning and there's no soundness in my flesh. He doesn't tell us or he doesn't mention the exact nature of his physical suffering.

[12 : 31] He doesn't tell us what it is. Was he sick with some sort of disease? Had he been injured and was he trying to recover from wounds suffered during battle or something else?

We have no idea and that's probably best because any number of physical maladies can come to us from the hand of God as correction.

And David acknowledges the reality that his physical suffering is a result of his sin. He has sinned and now God is bringing into his life these difficulties to awaken him, to move him to repentance, to make him more like Christ.

And then there is layered in on top of the physical anguish that he's feeling, there is the mental or psychological anguish that he experiences. Jesus. He describes that starting in verse 8.

He says, I am feeble and crushed and then he says, I groan because of the tumult or the storminess of my heart.

[13 : 43] Like, he pictures his heart, it's being stirred up in a bad way. Have you ever felt that? Have you ever just felt this great sense of unease in your heart?

Things, they won't, they won't settle. No matter what you do, they won't settle. That's what David is describing. I groan because of the tumult of my heart.

And then he says, O Lord, all my longing, my unmet desires, they are before you.

My sighing is not hidden from you. He says, my heart throbs, my strength fails me.

If ever there was a description of deep anxiety, this is it. Lots of internal turmoil and trouble and worry and fear and anxiety.

[14 : 46] This is what David is describing. He says, the light of my eyes, it has also gone from me. We've all probably seen the difference.

We've noticed the difference between the bright eyes of those who are excited about life, who have good things they think out in front of them and they feel good, everything's going well, and then the dimly lit eyes, the downcast face of those who are really struggling with something on the inside.

God's people are not promised that we will never experience fear and anxiety in this world. We're not. And the experience of that in your life doesn't mean that you're some sort of bad Christian, that you're any more broken than anyone else around you.

It may be God's hand of discipline coming into your life, and that may be why you're filled with fear. In fact, our sin creates this kind of dividing wall between us and God so that it's no wonder that those that Christians who are used to fellowship with God, who are used to living in the light of his presence in their life, that when they sin, they begin to experience feelings of doubt and insecurity. They begin to worry about things that they normally would just not even pay attention to, and the things that people say in passing weigh on them, and they ponder them, and they think, because sin causes us to lose the sense of security that we have in Christ.

[16 : 41] Not our actual security that we have in Christ, but the sense and the feeling of security that we have in Jesus is stripped away from us when we move away from him and towards sin.

But the good news is that there's a way back always. Jesus says, cast your cares, your worries, your anxieties upon me.

Give me your burdens, and then take upon, take my cares, take my burdens upon you, because my burden, Jesus says, is easy and light. Now, what could that possibly mean?

Because we've already seen Jesus learned obedience through suffering. Jesus suffered in all the ways that we suffer in this life. So when Jesus says, my yoke is easy, my burden is light, he doesn't mean by that that, look, I live a carefree life.

Take that upon yourself. No. Jesus, though, walks around with a clear conscience, with intimate fellowship with his father.

[17 : 52] He says, I and the father are one. He says in the gospel of John, I only do the things my father tells me to do.

That creates an anxiety-free life. life. That restores security when it's been lost.

And for Jesus to say, look, bring me your anxieties and your cares. I'll take them from you. Take my burden. It's light. It's easy. Because in me, your fellowship with the father can be restored.

We do not have to fear that our anxiety will be unrelenting and never end. We just have to release the burdens that we're hanging on to and then reach out and take the freedom that is offered to us in Jesus.

The problem though is that sin prevents us from doing that very thing. Sin is the very thing that stands between us and Jesus, interrupting the intimacy of fellowship that we have with him and so it often automatically brings God's discipline in the form of anxiety into our lives.

[19 : 16] Sometimes we suffer physically. Oftentimes, most of the time, if not all the time, we suffer from our sins mentally, psychologically, spiritually, however you want to say it.

We feel this groaning and longing in our hearts. But then sometimes, it also affects our relationships with others.

David says in verse 11, my friends and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my nearest kin stand far off.

This makes me think of Job in the midst of Job's sufferings. most of his family had been taken away from him, but his wife remained, and she was of no help at all.

Critical, biting, inviting him to abandon God altogether. And then when his friends showed up, they spent most of their time accusing him and pointing the finger at him and blaming him for everything.

[20 : 24] there are times when even our friends and companions, even our brothers and sisters in Christ, because they're sinful too, when they will respond to us, when they see trouble in our lives, and they will take a step back.

Now, they're responsible for that action, but remember, God is at work even in that. the aloofness and the distance that you may feel and experience from your friends and fellow believers may be coming to you from the very hand of God, as he deprives you of one of the sources of joy that you had, in order for your eyes to be open so that you can see your sin.

But not just your friends and companions, because David talks about his enemies trying to seize an opportunity. He says in verse 12, those who seek my life lay their snares, those who seek my hurt speak of ruin and meditate treachery all the day long.

I hope that you don't have anyone in your life who seeks your hurt. But David, after all, was King David, right? And so he had lots of enemies.

He had enemies within. There were coups, there were attempts to take over. There were those at the beginning of his reign who didn't believe he was even worthy to be king.

[22 : 00] And then he had enemies on the outside. He had other nations, some that he had conquered, some who were afraid that he was going to conquer them, some that just wanted to

conquer him. He had lots of enemies.

And in the times where he was experiencing suffering, they saw an opportunity, an opportunity to strike. strike. And I hope that you don't have people in your life like that, but sometimes we do. Sometimes you have co-workers who wait for the opportunity for you to be off. And then they try to step in and push you to the side, push you further down the ladder.

Or you might have family members who wait for that time when the light of your eyes has grown dim, and you've shut your doors and closed yourself off and you're in pain and you're suffering on the inside, and they wait for that opportunity, and then they jump.

And they pile on more. Or that's when they begin to whisper things to others. You may have those kinds of people in your life. But do not think that God cannot use even those people and their sin to discipline you and make you more like Jesus.

[23 : 20] If God can use Satan in the life of Job, he can use your nasty companions at work or those bitter family members to make you more like Jesus.

He can use them to open your eyes to your own sin so that you might repent. which brings us to the last thing that I really want to say this morning, and that is that David also outlines his response to all of this.

How should we respond when we recognize that physical suffering or mental anguish or relational problems have crept into our lives as a result of God's hand of discipline upon us?

When we recognize that, we've prayed about it, we've sought the Lord, and we see clearly now, oh, my sin brought this upon me. This is God's hand of discipline.

How do we respond when we realize that? What do we do? Well, we don't then begin to complain and just multiply our sin.

[24 : 33] That's not what David does. He says in verse 13, In other words, he's not trying to answer back his accusers.

He's not trying to fix everything or complain about things. No. He's just silent. And in his silence, he says he waits. But for you, oh Lord, do I wait.

It is you, oh Lord, my God, who will answer. God will answer. God will come. But that requires waiting.

Because the sovereign God of the universe does not adjust his timetable to fit yours. He doesn't do it. And so we wait sometimes.

He does pray in the midst of that waiting though. Only let them not rejoice over me who boast against me when my foot slips. Because I'm ready to fall, he says. My pain is always right in front of me.

[25 : 51] Even as he waits, hear his pain right in front of him. And so the first thing that we need to do is not to turn the tables upon God and begin to complain to him. And not to try to fix things ourselves by answering back all of our critics and setting everything right.

Wait upon the Lord to do that. But the most important thing is what David does in verse 18. He says, I confess my iniquity.

I am sorry for my sin. I confess. I admit. I did this. I said this.

I walked away from fellowship with you. And now all these things, the rubble of my bad decisions surround me.

But I don't complain. I confess. confess. I did it. I did it. I put myself in a position where in order to turn me back, you had to put a heavy hand upon me and force me back into the place where I ought to be.

[27 : 10] I confess my sin. There's a world of difference between complaining to God about your circumstances and confessing your sin to God in light of your circumstances.

And David says, I confess and I'm sorry for my sin. But it doesn't end there.

It doesn't just end in sorrowful confession and now he just has to sit in sadness. because as soon as he confesses his sins, David will then next turn toward the promises of God.

He says in verses 21 and 22, Do not forsake me, O Lord. O my God, be not far from me. These are pleas from David based upon the promises of God.

A God who promises that he will never forsake us. A God who promises that he will draw near to us in our pain. David calls upon those kinds of promises.

[28 : 23] Don't forsake me. O my God, be not far from me, but make haste to help me. O Lord, my salvation.

In you, in you alone do I find help and salvation. So I cry out to you, remember your great promises. I repent, I turn away, I confess.

Now remember your promises that you made to me, God. Which takes us all the way back to the beginning of the psalm. Most of us, when we read the psalms, we skip over the stuff that comes before verse 1 because we don't realize it's a part of the psalm.

It's not like a title that somebody added later on. It's a part of the psalm. excuse me. And this psalm is described in this way in the ESV, a psalm of David for the memorial offering.

Now that's a weird translation for the memorial offering, I think. Literally, it means in order to cause remembrance, to cause to remember, or to bring about remembering.

[29 : 35] that's what it means. I think David is telling us at the beginning why he wrote this psalm. It's to bring to remembrance.

And he's not trying to remind himself of anything here. He's aware of his own sin. But he's calling on God ultimately. Remember your promises.

It's where he starts, and it's where he ends. God, remember your promises. God has made us great promises.

He has promised that all those who put their faith in Jesus will be rescued from sin and will have eternal life. He has promised those of us who have done that, that he will work all things for our good, and he will make us more like Jesus.

God has given us great promises. He has promised that he will finish the work that he began in us, that he won't leave us incomplete, partially assembled followers of Jesus, but he'll finish the work that he started in us.

[30 : 46] He has promised us that he will never leave us and never forsake us. He has promised us that when we walk through dark valleys, he will be there right beside us, shepherding us through those things.

God has given us great, great promises. And the way out of your pain and the right way to respond to God's discipline is to repent and then remind God, you made these promises and I'm going to cling to these promises.

Let's pray together. God, I am thankful for you.