

**Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church**  
**The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 12, Verses 1-8**  
**Notes From Class on April 20, 2010**  
**Last Revised on (April 25, 2010)**

**Songs**

**Opening Prayer**

Dear God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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Thank you for the opportunity to gather here tonight and study the Bible together.

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Your word is overwhelming in its depth and beauty.

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Please guide us into it, and be our only teacher.

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Please open our hearts and minds,

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help us to understand properly,

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Please glorify yourself in our eyes.

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Help us to be more like Jesus.

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In His Name we pray.

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Amen

**Introduction**

Welcome and thanks for coming to our weekly Bible study.

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Presently, as you know, we are studying the New Testament Book of **Hebrews**.

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Last we finished Chapter **11**.

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Tonight we will begin Chapter **12**.

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But first let's begin, as usual, with a quick review of what we have studied so far.

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And before we begin our review, let me give you a chance to get whatever you might need.

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There is coffee and tea at the back.

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If you do not already have one, please pick up a copy of the handout containing the ESV text for Hebrews.

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Please get what you need and let's get started.

## **Review**

OK, let's review.

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As we have continually noted,

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Hebrews appears to be the text of a **sermon**,

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written around the end of the **First Century**, A.D,

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to be delivered to a group of **Christians**

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at least some of whom were in danger of "**falling away**"

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and who needed to be encouraged to "**hold fast**" to their faith in Jesus Christ.

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The preacher reminds them of the **unqualified** supremacy of Christ **(1:1 - 3:6)**.

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and urges them not to repeat the mistakes of the Children of **Israel**,

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who had so often fallen away from **God**. **(3:7 - 4:13)**.

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He portrays Jesus as a great **high priest** **(4:14 - 5:10)**

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and tries to help them understand that to reject **Jesus**, would be to reject **all** hope of salvation. **(5:11 - 6:20)**

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The old **priesthood** and **law** have been superseded and replaced **(7:1 - 8:7)**.

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The Old **Covenant** has been replaced by a **New** Covenant **(8:8-8:13)**.

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The **ceremonies** and rituals of the Old Covenant are **obsolete**. **(Chapter 9)**

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The death of **Christ** atoned for sin --- once for all **(Chapter 10:1-18)**.

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Now **all** may draw near to God with confidence **(Chapter 10:19-22)**.

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and if we have **faith** and **persevere** until the end, our souls shall be **preserved**. **(Chapter 10:23-39)**

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Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets: by faith **they** persevered through great difficulty and through them God accomplished many mighty things. **(Chapter 11:1-34)**

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But during their lifetimes few of these heroes of faith received much of what God had promised. Some were mocked, persecuted, tortured, and killed for their faith. **All** died without seeing Christ. **(Chapter 11:35-40)**

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There is therefore no excuse for **Christians** to lose faith and fall away, even when we have very great trouble in this world. Such trouble has **always** come to people of faith. The faithful of an earlier era held fast even without the blessed assurance of knowing of Christ.

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This, I think, is the lesson being taught through to the end of Chapter 11 and this completes our review.

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Questions? Comments?

### **Hebrews, Chapter 12, Verses 1-3**

OK, then, will somebody please read Hebrews, Chapter 12, Verses 1-3, in Japanese.

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Thank you. Now will someone please read those verses in English (ESV).

**1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,**

**2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**

**3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.**

Thank you.

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Again, Verse 1 reads

**(Verse 1)**

**Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,**

The first word, "**therefore**," looks back to Chapter 11,

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which has to do with the many heroes of faith, all or most from the pre-Christian era, who are here called "so great a cloud of **witnesses**."

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The preacher says that "**we** are **surrounded**" by them.

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By "we" he must mean to include at least **himself** and those to whom he is **speaking** and presumably other Christians as well.

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And **because** of this, he says to whatever Christians hear his voice, "let's **run**."

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This introduces a **running** metaphor that continues intermittently to at least verse 13.

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This is an unusual **racing** metaphor, it seems to me, insofar as neither speed nor competition are ever mentioned.

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Rather this is some kind of an ordeal in which **everyone** wins who **continues** running until the end.

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He says, to us also I think, "let's run with **endurance** the race that is set before us!"

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This theme of endurance is **predominate** in Hebrews as we have seen.

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The implication just here, I think, is that just as the great cloud of witnesses from the pre-Christian era ran with endurance the race set before **them**, we are to run with endurance the race that is set before **us**.

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In other words they are **examples** for us. (n.b. "let us **also** lay aside .... "

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They testify **to** us, through their **actions**, what faith **looks** like.

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They are a witness **to** us.

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The grammar would also permit us to read that they are witnesses **of** us (i.e. **spectators** of our race) but that is probably not the right reading here.

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No we are being encouraged to run **our** race with endurance as they ran **theirs**.

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It seems everyone's race course and finish line is a little bit different, some things all have in common.

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To successfully complete this race, one should lay aside every unnecessary **weight**

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That's why runners train and keep their body weight down, and wear light clothing, and certainly do not carry with them **anything** that is not necessary for the running of the race.

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Here the metaphore breaks down a bit, where the preacher speaks of laying aside "sin which clings so closely"

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I think the image is of sin being like tight clothing that clings to us and makes is difficult to run.

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And sin does make it cumbersome and difficult to endure in faith.

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Many of the heroes of faith in the Old Testament were tripped up and weighted down by sin.

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So these Biblical witnesses give us both positive and negative examples for how to run our race.

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Q. So how shall we used these examples?

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Q. As we get ready to run our race of endurance in faith, who is our best positive example?

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Q. Is it Abraham? Noah? Moses?

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A. It is none of that great cloud of witnesses, however great and useful.

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A. The standard example now is Jesus of Nazareth.

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He is the perfect original of which all of the witnesses are partial and imperfect copies.

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In other words, Jesus is the only purely positive example of humanity.

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His is the pattern of what everyone should be, and will be, like

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but nobody else yet is like.

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That is the sense of Verse 2

(Verse 2)

**looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**

We are to look to Jesus

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He is here described (in the ESV) as the "founder and perfecter of our faith."

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There is some discussion among commentators about how best to translated this wonderful description.

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The KJV has it "the **author** and **finisher** of *our* faith"

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and the word "our" is in italics, meaning that the article is not present in the original language.

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This means that the translators into English had three choices here: "**our** faith," "**the** faith," or simply "**faith**."

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There are reasons to prefer the latter in the current context, because we are not speaking of **doctrine**.

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Here we are concerned simply with **faith**, in **God**, and how this manifests itself in human behavior.

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The sort of faith which is in view in Chapter 11, is belief in God, manifesting itself as **trust** and **obedience**, which **endures** and **perseveres** in this life in the face of **opposition**, **difficulty**, **suffering**, and even **death**.

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It is a faith which looks **beyond**: beyond this **life** and beyond this **world** for its final reward,  
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and which does **not** insist on inheriting the promise in **this** life.

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Such faith has only ever been seen **perfectly** in Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Son of God.

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Nevertheless the men and women who the preachers mentions in Chapter 11, and many other characters in the Bible, do also exhibit **some** such faith, albeit **partially** and **imperfectly**.

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The Old Testament characters could not have known it, but the **substance** of their faith was the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ, who would later come down to redeem them from sin and then ascend to prepare the place to which their faith was always looking.

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In other words, the **faith** of the men and women listed in Chapter 11 would have been absolutely **empty** and totally **pointless** except for the subsequent work of Jesus of Nazareth.

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So **our** faith, and indeed **all** faith, is founded and perfected in him and he is the only perfect example of it.

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And this **perfect** example is now **openly** before our eyes.

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Verse 3 asks us to consider him.

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Before we do, does anyone have any comments or questions?

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OK. Verse 3 reads

(Verse 3)

**Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.**

The Son of God had a choice!

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He came down willingly and became a man.

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He remained willingly to complete his work in our behalf, to atone for our sins.

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He did so despite the hostility directed against him by the very sinners he came to save.

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It was a horrible dirty job that only He could do.

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He did it (we are told in Verse 2) because of the joy set before him.

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That could only be the joy of his coming kingdom, of which we are beneficiaries.

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With all of this in view, with Christ in view, the sin against which we struggle need not discourage us.

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God in Christ knows what it is like to struggle against temptation and to experience hostility.

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He did not know sin as we do, because he never sinned,

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but he has suffered the full punishment of our sins.

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so that we can continue confidently, on to share in his victory.

**Hebrews, Chapter 12, Verses 4-8**

Will somebody please read Hebrews, Chapter 12, Verses 4-8, in Japanese.

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Thank you. Now will someone please read those verses in English (ESV).

**4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.**

**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?**

**8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.**

Thank you.

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In reading verse 4, I hear emphasis on the word "your"

**(Verse 4)**

**In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.**

Jesus struggled against sin, and resisted it **successfully**, to the point of death on a cross.

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Our struggle against sin is different, and easier, because we are **less** successful.

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We may sometimes resist a particular temptation to the point of significant suffering, possibly even to death, but more often we give in to temptation, and sin.

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Most of us can't even **imagine** what it would be like to resist temptation to the point of death.

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Although some have done that --- the great and glorious martyrs

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Yet even these could not know what Christ endured.

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Because the Son of God really had a choice.

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He had to endure not only suffering but the temptation to turn aside from it.

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So we should not overestimate the depth of our own suffering.

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It is just a small token of the suffering endured by the Son of God.

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Neither should we forget that such suffering is actually good.



**(Verse 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.**

This is not a fresh insight, but something the people of God had always know.

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When God's children struggle, it is for their own benefit.

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Their struggles are even **proof** of their sonship.

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When we see wicked men prospering and enjoying an easy life, we should **pity** them, not envy them.

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Certainly we should not be resentful to God!

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Why?

**(Verse 6)**

**For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."**

"Chastisement" has the connotation of "**punishment**."

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Loving parents **do** chastise their children, whenever their children transgress the boundaries set for them, or disobey the instructions given to them.

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"**Discipline**" may or may not connote punishment.

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The setting of boundaries and the giving of rules and instructions is **itself** discipline of a sort, even when children obey.

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So the ten commandments and the sermon on the mount constitute discipline for God's **household**.

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In both cases these were instructions given to those who had **already** been saved!

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The instructions are given to God's **household** and not to his enemies.

**(Verse 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?**

You may ask: If Jesus has **already** overcome satan, sin and death, why must God's children stay in this world, why must they struggle, and why must they be encouraged to endure such struggles, even unto pain and death?

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The answer appears to be "**discipline**."

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We are plainly not perfect (yet) but we are God's children, whom he **loves**, and he has not given up on us.

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On the contrary, Christ has come to **atone** for our sins.

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God has **called** us out of the world to faith in Christ.

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God has caused his **Spirit** to dwell in us.

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Now we are undergoing a process of **sanctification**, which is mysterious, difficult and painful and takes time and therefore requires some **endurance**.

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Eventually our present bodies will **die**, when God is finished with this loving restoration.

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Thus will our souls be preserved, if only we persevere until the end.

**(Verse 8)**

**If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.**

We should not **wish** to be free of God's discipline or try to escape it.

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That way lies the path to **Hell**.

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***n.b. this is where we ran out of time on April 20; a complete transcript of the following prayer is not available.***

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father,

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Show us our sin, and help us to repent of it.

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Please sanctify us and let us not grow weary of your discipline.

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Thank you for loving us enough to correct us and make us perfect.

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Please help us to persevere until the end.

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In Jesus Name we pray.

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Amen