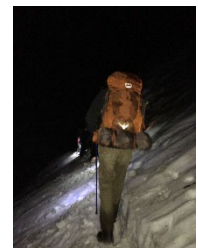
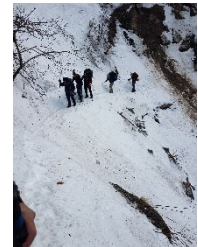


I believe we should stop and pray right now for our brothers and sisters in Mozambique. Additionally, 11 AG people were abducted from a church meeting in Nigeria.¹

Bruce has been my friend for nearly 50 years. We celebrated Thanksgiving with him and my cousin Linda this year. At one point he told us the story of how he and his mission's team were trapped at 10,000 feet on a Himalayan mountain due to an off-season, freak snowstorm.

- They were carrying **water filtration equipment** to a village whose mortality rate was 80% for children and animals due to poor water.
- They **did not have** their warmest clothing, nor did they have SAT phones because there was cell service.
- The sudden and severe storm **knocked out cell** service and they heard at least 12 avalanches.
- They delivered the equipment to the **village at 13,500 feet** elevation and then returned to a safer place to camp.
- By this time, they were in **bad shape**: one of their members had broken a leg and **three were 'caught'** before they went over the edge: one by his ankles, one by his backpack, and one fell down the slope 6' but wedged into a tree.
- It was **too dangerous to return**, so a sherpa and the global worker decided to cross the avalanches and get help.
- **For five days they camped** in -20-to-20-degree temperatures not knowing if those getting help made it down or not.
- Bruce was out of the tent praying and having his devotions when he heard the echoes of a helicopter's rotors. Help had arrived.



What emotion would you experience in that moment? Joy & gratitude.

¹ [Call to Prayer for Christians in Nigeria | AG News](#), accessed 11-28-25.

When suffering comes, keep your eyes on Jesus - joy and gratitude are on the other side.

A famous author wrote, 'Gratitude is the highest form of thought.' – G.K. Chesterton² (I believe the lowest is criticism and gossip.)

We are going through **the book of Hebrews** this fall, and we are in the last two chapters. Let's **catch everyone up**.

Hebrews is 'a strange and difficult book'³ for several reasons.

It is 'strange and difficult' because ...

1. Five different cultures (Roman, Hebrew, Hellenists, Hellenistic Christians, and our culture).
2. It is a sermon to encourage people not to go back to Judaism because Jesus is better.

The preacher uses **symbols from ancient Judaism** to make his point that Jesus is better.

Minute Review

- Jesus is better than the angels, 1:4-2:18.
- Jesus is better than Moses & Joshua, 3:1-4:14.
- Jesus is better than the High Priest, 4:14-7:28.
- Jesus is better than the OT Covenant & Sacrifices, 8:1-10:18. (Block) He then encourages the people *to* ...
- Draw near and persevere, 10:19-39. **Chapter 11** is an explanation of Habakkuk's verse, 'But my righteous one will live by faith (He 10:38 [Hab 2:4] NIV).' Living faithfully means to believe and act upon what is not yet but will be. He defines faith and encourages them to follow the OT heroes' example.
- The essence of faith & OT heroes 11:1-31.
- Heroes who endured suffering, 11:32-12:3.

But the **ultimate example** of enduring suffering is Jesus: 'And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he *endured the cross*, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who *endured such opposition* from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (He 12:1-3 NIV).'

² Peggy Noonan, 'Don't Be Shy, Gratitude is Good for You,' *WSJ* (11/26/25), accessed 11/29/25.

³ N.T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 710.

Today, the preacher unpacks what it means to **suffer like Jesus**, to suffer as a Christ-follower. He gives his **fifth and final warning**, but his **illustration** leads naturally to thanksgiving and worship.

Something Better

Suffering & Worship, 12:4-29



I **understand this pastor**. He is warning his people to get ready for suffering.

- **Jesus prepared** his disciples. The night of his betrayal he said, 'In this world you will have trouble (Jn 16:33 NIV).'
- When **inflation raised** its ugly head several years ago, I encouraged you to get out of debt and that **physical items now** have more value than before, so get things repaired and have garage sales.⁴
- They must **keep their eyes on Jesus** and get rid of sin that weighs them down so they can run the race of faith with perseverance. He says to 'Throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles (He 12:1 NIV).'

He moves from getting rid of sin to suffering ...

1. Christian View of Suffering, 12:4-13.

'In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." ⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ... ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it (He 12:4-7, 11 NIV).'

This preacher is *not* **giving us the philosophical** reasons *why* Christians may suffer; he is *preparing* them **to go through suffering**. He wants them to keep 'their **troubles in proper perspective** ... (as) God's method of training and disciplining them.'⁵

- The 119th Psalm says, 'It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees (Ps 119:71 NIV).'

⁴ Rachael Ensign, Rachel Wolfe, 'The Middle Class is Buckling Under Almost Five Years of Persistent Inflation,' *WSJ* (11/21/25). [The Middle Class Is Buckling Under Almost Five Years of Persistent Inflation - WSJ](#)

⁵ F.F. Bruce, *NICNT Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Willam B. Eerdmans, 1990), 342.

- Jesus taught: 'Blessed are those who are persecuted ... ¹¹ when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven (Mt 5:10-12 NIV).'
- **Whatever the reasons we suffer, if we view it as God's training, then we can go through anything!**
- No discipline seems pleasant ... but when suffering comes, keep your eyes on Jesus - joy and gratitude are on the other side. There is something BETTER!

Our preacher returns to his word picture of running a race when he **links two OT**

quotes together: 'Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees (Is 35:3). ¹³ "Make level paths for your feet (Pro 4:26)," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed (He 12:12-13 NIV).'

- The runner must **stop flailing his arms** and resume the posture of someone serious about competition.
- This is the ancient equivalent of Nike's 'Just Do It,' or NE Patriot's 'Do your job.'
- The **Isaiah** passage *continues* with 'Be strong, fear not! Behold your God will come ... He will come and save you (Is 35:3f LXX).'
- The **Proverbs** passage is *preceded* with 'Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you (Pro 4:25 NIV).'

Living a holy life will help us run life's race.

2. A Call to Holiness, 12:14-17.

'Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. ¹⁶ See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. ¹⁷ Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done (He 12:14-17 NIV).'

If you want to finish the race, here is the to-do list:

Do this to be holy:

- Pursue peace.
- Be holy. This is the fourth time holiness is mentioned. Even though it is a passive verb here, we have a responsibility to seek holiness.
- Have no 'bitter root'. A bitter root is the source of an ungodly attitude (Dt 29:18). A bad attitude spreads like a rumor or like weeds. A bitter root will destroy a church or a marriage.
- Be sexually pure.
- Respect God and spiritual matters.

Esau was shortsighted, he gave up his birthright for a single meal. **Let's not be shortsighted** and lose out on eternity.⁶

To get them **focused on eternity**, he *contrasts* two mountains.

- **Mount Sinai** was fire and fear.
- **Mount Zion** is joy and celebration.

3. Fear & Joy, 12:18-24.

'You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; ¹⁹ to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, ²⁰ because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." ²¹ The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

Remember when Israel arrived at Mount Sinai?

Mount Sinai - terrifying.

- One cannot be near it.
- Burning with fire.
- Gloomy and stormy.
- A voice that scares them.

The trembling ground is a word picture of judgement. Without holiness, one cannot see God.

- Our preacher is giving them **an eternal perspective**, like Jesus did: 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul (Mt 10:28 NIV).'
- Let's have **a holy fear of God**. We were **created for eternity**.

After he has scared them he gives them hope. The joy and celebration of our heavenly home, Mount Zion. 'But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (He 12:18-24 NIV).'

What a contrast – fear v. joy, fire v. celebration!

⁶ His people 'might be tempted to give up their heavenly calling for the sake of temporary relief', R.T. France in Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition* 13 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2006), 174.

Mount Zion – joy!!

- God Himself is there, close.
- Filled with joyful angels.
- Filled with heroes and saints – the perfect.
- Jesus whose blood brings salvation. Abel’s blood protested his murder, but Jesus’ blood ‘brings a message of cleansing, forgiveness, and peace with God to all who place their faith in him.’⁷

This is the city that the ancient heroes looked forward to by faith. God always has something better planned, if we will just keep our eyes focused on him!

The **emphasis** on this word picture of Mount Zion is joy and security.

When suffering comes, keep your eyes on Jesus - joy and gratitude are on the other side.

Now, his final warning.

4. Fifth And Final Warning, 12:25-29.

‘See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? ²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” ²⁷ The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain (He 12:25-27 NIV).’

Throughout this sermon there is **potential for believers** to fall away, to reject God’s grace.⁸

Five Warnings:

- Drifting away, 2:1.
- Hardening heart, 3:8.
- Falling away, 6:6.
- Keep on sinning, 10:26.
- Turn away from God’s voice, 12:25.

⁷ F.F. Bruce, *NICNT Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Willam B. Eerdmans, 1990), 361.

⁸ ‘And the possibility of apostasy’, Melissa L. Archer, ‘Reverence and Awe: Reclaiming the biblical posture of worship,’ *Influence* (Summer 2025), pp. 118-20 (119).

All these warnings have antidotes.

Five Warnings:

- Don't drift away (2:1), pay careful attention to what you've heard (2:1).
- Don't harden your heart (3:8), encourage each other daily (3:18).
- Don't fall away (6:6), train yourselves with God's word (5:14).
- Don't sin (10:26), look at how far you've come and persevere (10:32, 36).
- Don't turn away from God's voice (12:25), be grateful and worship God (12:28-29).

Even though he is **warning them** he, he is *also* pointing them to **their wonderful future** – something BETTER: 'Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹for our "God is a consuming fire (He 12:28-29 NIV)."'

When suffering comes, keep your eyes on Jesus - joy and gratitude are on the other side.

Let's be **grateful and worship God** with reverence and awe, for our God is the one who still shakes the earth with his voice.

Acceptable worship is ...

- More **concerned with God** than us or our feelings.
- **Lives a holy life** of faith before a holy God.

Recently, I came across a great quote: 'The only answer to grace is thanksgiving ... Gratitude follows grace like thunder lightning.' – Karl Barth⁹

When we really have the revelation of God's great grace, it lights up our soul, and we naturally give Him thanks.

⁹ Karl Bath, *Church Dogmatics IV.1* (T & T Clark, 2004), 41.