

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Against the Flow

(studies in Jeremiah)

The Hammer Falls

(Jeremiah 52)

Study #12

Introduction: When God cares enough to send the very best...

There was genuine desperation in the voice of the man suffering from leprosy as he asked Dr. Paul Brand,¹ *“How can I live without pain?!”*²

Along with its other horrors, leprosy destroys the body’s ability to feel pain. And it is the absence of pain that permits a leprosy victim to walk miles and miles in ill-fitting shoes, put out candles with his fingers and handle a splintered hammer for hours.

Pain-free living results in deformed feet, burnt-off fingers and bloody palms. It is pain alone that will protect the leper from continuing on a road that leads to self-destruction.

While he was alive, Dr. Brand was on record for cheering pain as one of God’s greatest gifts. *“Thank God for pain!”* he says. Without pain, we would engage in destructive behavior and never know it until it was too late.

¹ Dr. Brand received the Albert Lasker medical award in 1960 and was named Commander of the Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth in 1961.

² This narrative is found in Philip Yancey’s book, Where is God When It Hurts?, Zondervan, 1977.

The Bible teaches us that there is a tremendously redemptive power of pain for the child of God and assures us that the pain of God’s judgment and the pain of His discipline are among the most powerful tools in His toolbox. He uses pain to turn us back from a disastrous course and to turn us back to following Him.

Today you and I come to the final installment in our series of studies in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah is a fantastic book, and I hope you have been blessed during our time exploring it. As you may have noticed, though, there is a somewhat confusing order to the book.

There are lots of sections where events are not placed in chronological order. Narrative does not follow narrative in sequence. The compilers of Jeremiah’s messages evidently weren’t concerned with timelines.

That being said, the last chapter will be the focus for our last session.³

The last chapter doesn’t actually bring us to the end of Jeremiah’s life story (for that story, you have to turn to chapters 40-42). But it does bring us to the end of the main story Jeremiah was intent on telling.

Jeremiah, chapter 52, brings us to the end of the story of Judah, the end of life for the Jews in the Promised Land, and the end of Jerusalem.⁴

This chapter is about judgment. And this message is about that most sobering of all biblical themes, the pain of judgment and the pain of God’s discipline in the life of His people.

³ When we think of someone sitting down to write a book, we usually think in terms of chronology. This was not the way Jeremiah’s book was put together. He preached over the course of decades and then the book was put together by himself and perhaps by later men who arranged the material, but it was not arranged chronologically.

⁴ Jeremiah 52 is based on 2 Kings 24:18--25:30 and is written mostly in the very words of the 2 Kings passage. It is also similar to 2 Chronicles 36:11-21. The last words of Jeremiah 51 suggest chapter 52 is an editor’s epilogue to the book.

Judgment on the Jews of Jeremiah's Day

Jeremiah's Career - Warning of Judgment

He warned over and over again

More than any other theme, the predominant theme of Jeremiah's book is judgment. The message of judgment permeates most every section of the book. Over and over again, the prophet warned the Jews to turn from their idolatry, their immorality, their sin - or face God's judgment in the form of the destruction of Jerusalem and Babylonian exile.⁵

We could take most of the morning to highlight examples of these warnings - but we won't! What I will do is assure you that the warnings are scattered throughout the book.

You find such warnings in chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 34, 35, 36, and 37! They are everywhere.

The people persistently ignored his warnings

Jeremiah wasn't at all the first to bring this message to the Jews. Many prophets preceded him with exactly the same message. And, for the most part, the people's response to those prophets was identical to the response they gave Jeremiah. They refused to listen.

Here is Jeremiah's testimony.

[25:3] From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, these twenty-three years the word of the Lord has come to me, and I have spoken to you again and again, BUT YOU HAVE NOT LISTENED.

The Jews thought that they had immunity from God's discipline because they were His people. They thought they could sin with impunity.

They honestly believed that they could behave however they wished - and that He would never punish them. "*God will never remove us from the Promised Land. After all, He promised it to us!*"

This idea that God will not judge or discipline His people dies hard. But it needed to die in the days of Jeremiah. They needed to understand that God would indeed discipline/punish/judge them - precisely BECAUSE they were His people.

And the idea needs to die today, too, because the fact of God's judgment is as real in 2010 as it was in the days of Jeremiah.

Judgment did come to the people of God in Jeremiah's day. But, it is not as if it came suddenly, unexpectedly, or without warning. Not at all.

The Lord brought discipline in stages and in increasingly severe measure. All along the way He provided loud hints of greater judgment to come if there was no repentance.

Judgment, by Stages

Among the first disciplines the Jews tasted was the division of the Kingdom over which David and Solomon had ruled. Solomon stopped following the Lord and the judgment for that sin was a ripping of the nation of Israel into two separate factions, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. That was quite a judgment.

Then, after two hundred years of apostasy, God allowed the northern kingdom to be obliterated by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Another devastating act of judgment.

Then, paralleling the moral and spiritual decline of the southern kingdom there followed generations of a steady decline for Judah in terms of economic health, international status, and military might. Judgment.

Any of these declines might have (should have!) prompted God's people to stop and consider their ways. But, except for brief and occasional seasons, they kept on marching to the beat of their own drummer - not the Lord's beat - and kept turning a deaf ear to the warnings of the prophets.

⁵ So Gleason Archer in [A Survey of Old Testament Introduction](#).

The major lead-up to the final judgment occurred during the life of Jeremiah. He was given what he never would have wished for - a front row seat to view the destruction of his people.

The path to destruction became obvious shortly after the Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. In short order the rising Babylonian power destroyed the Assyrians. And when the Babylonians came to world prominence, they very quickly set their sights on controlling the land of Palestine where the Jews lived.⁶

They wanted to dominate and to take Judah's treasures, but they weren't necessarily committed to a military action. They would have rather taken over peacefully.

They first bullied Judah into paying tribute, which she did.

Then, in 605 BC, Babylon's king, Nebuchadnezzar, took political control of the city. On two occasions he deported groups of influential citizens off to Babylon.⁷

In 598 BC he installed a puppet king, Zedekiah, to do his bidding.

By degrees, the Lord was giving His people a taste of what judgment would look like. All of this should have prompted them to repent, to return to Him, to worship, to lead holy lives. But they never did turn.

So, finally, centuries after the first warnings in the days of Solomon and after decades of warnings by Jeremiah, the hammer of God's judgment fell.

The hammer's fall was prompted by the action of Nebuchadnezzar's lap dog, King Zedekiah.⁸

⁶ See 2 Kings 20, where a former king, Hezekiah, showed a Babylonian delegation all of the treasure of Jerusalem. From that point on Babylon was determined to plunder the city.

⁷ First, Daniel and his friends (and others) in 605 BC. Then, there was a second deportation in 597.

⁸ This is how Zedekiah came to the throne: Jehoiakim (son of Josiah) was appointed king of Judah by Pharaoh Neco of Egypt. He reigned until his death in 598 BC. Jehoiachin, (son of Jehoiakim) reigned in Jerusalem for three months following his father's death. Then, Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon where he was

The Hammer Falls

Zedekiah's rebellion (vv. 1-3)⁹

[3]...And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

King Zedekiah

Nebuchadnezzar had appointed Zedekiah king of Judah in place of Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin was a king who had enjoyed a short, three-month reign before he was sentenced to life in prison in the land of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah on the throne in hopes that he would be submissive to Babylon's wishes.

But in every way, Zedekiah turned out to be a rebel.

Tragically, he rebelled against God. Zedekiah's life is summarized as are the lives of so many of the kings: ***[2 Kings 24:19] He did evil in the sight of the Lord.***

But he also rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. That rebellion was the straw that broke the camel's back and spelled the end of the Jewish state in Palestine.¹⁰

King Zedekiah rebels

What is often missed is that Zedekiah's rebellion against the king of Babylon was actually a rebellion against God's discipline.

kept in prison for thirty seven years. When Jehoiachin was removed from the throne, Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah, another son of Josiah, the king of Judah. Zedekiah's given name was Mattaniah, but Nebuchadnezzar changed his name to Zedekiah, "gift of Yahweh".

⁹ ***[1] Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. [2] He did evil in the sight of the Lord like all that Jehoiakim had done. [3] For through the anger of the Lord this came about in Jerusalem and Judah until He cast them out from His presence. And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.***

¹⁰ He also proved faithless in dealing with a group of his slaves. He had granted them their freedom, and then broke faith with them by heartlessly re-enslaving them! (Jeremiah 34:8, 16, 21).

He should have submitted, but he didn't and when he didn't submit to Babylon, he virtually guaranteed Judah's destruction.

Now we don't know what gave Zedekiah the idea that he could succeed in a rebellion against the Babylonians. But when he did rebel,¹¹ the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, didn't take it lying down.

What follows in the remainder of Jeremiah 52 is a description of the siege, destruction, and plunder of Jerusalem along with a description of the punishment of the rebels.

It was in the 9th year of Zedekiah's reign when he rebelled. The Babylonian siege followed in short order.

*Babylonian siege (vv. 4-6)*¹²

[4] Now it came about in the ninth year of his reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, camped against it and built a siege wall all around it.

Nebuchadnezzar would have used all of the technology of war available to him in the siege of Jerusalem.

Think "Lord of the Rings". There would have been siege mounds and barricades. The Babylonians would have used massive battering rams to pound the city's walls. Nebuchadnezzar would have erected mobile towers from which missiles or burning tar could have been hurled.

The siege lasted eighteen long months.¹³ During that time, no one entered or left the city. There was no re-supply. At the year and a half mark (as verse 6 tells us) the people of Jerusalem were near starvation.

¹¹ We know that he had hoped for an alliance with Egypt to stand against Babylon, but this alliance did not materialize. He probably refused to continue to pay tribute to Babylon.

¹² ***[4] Now it came about in the ninth year of his reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, camped against it and built a siege wall all around it. [5] So the city was under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. [6] On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land.***

At the time that the city was running out of food, the Babylonians breached the walls and the invading army swept in.

*As the walls are breached, Jewish soldiers flee (vv. 7-8)*¹⁴

We can only imagine the scene. Pandemonium and chaos reigned while the city was overrun. All of the slaughter and atrocities of war were unleashed on the city of God.

And, then, under the cover of night, while there was utter chaos in the city, Jewish soldiers somehow slipped through the ranks of the Babylonian army surrounding the city and fled east toward Jericho, taking King Zedekiah with them.¹⁵

Evidently Zedekiah and his men knew the area around Jerusalem well enough to snake through the oppressive Babylonian presence to freedom.

And while it wouldn't be accurate to say "they almost made it", they did manage to travel a few miles before they were missed, sought, captured and then taken to stand before Nebuchadnezzar - who was in a really bad mood.

The Babylonian King had stationed himself at a place called Riblah, an ancient Syrian town on the Orontes River, north of Palestine.

Those who were brought to him discovered that his punishments were severe and ruthless.

¹³ Siege against Jerusalem began near the beginning of January 15th, 588 BC and lasted for about eighteen months (the walls of Jerusalem were breached July 18th, 587 BC.)

¹⁴ ***[7] Then the city was broken into, and all the men of war fled and went forth from the city at night by way of the gate between the two walls which was by the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were all around the city. And they went by way of the Arabah. [8] But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho, and all his army was scattered from him.***

¹⁵ The Arabah was the semi-arid land to the east of Jerusalem that led to the plains of Jericho.

Punishment for the rebels (vv. 9-11, 24-27)

Put to death (vv. 24-27)¹⁶

[27] Then the king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath.

We read here about some of those who were singled out for execution. They are high-ranking government officials and officers of the Temple. They are military leaders and religious leaders.¹⁷

They are shown no mercy. They are summarily killed.

And then Zedekiah, the king who rebelled against the King who put him in place, was brought before Nebuchadnezzar. The treatment he received reminds us that some things are worse than death.

Worse than death (vv. 9-11)¹⁸

[10] The king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and he also slaughtered all the princes of Judah in Riblah. [11] Then he blinded the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him with bronze fetters and brought him to Babylon and put him in prison until the day of his death.

¹⁶ [24] *Then the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest and Zephaniah the second priest, with the three officers of the temple. [25] He also took from the city one official who was overseer of the men of war, and seven of the king's advisers who were found in the city, and the scribe of the commander of the army who mustered the people of the land, and sixty men of the people of the land who were found in the midst of the city. [26] Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. [27] Then the king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was led away into exile from its land.*

¹⁷ There is reason to believe that prior to execution, there was torture and perhaps flogging. See verse 27, “*struck them down and put them to death.*”

¹⁸ [9] *Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he passed sentence on him. [10] The king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and he also slaughtered all the princes of Judah in Riblah. [11] Then he blinded the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him with bronze fetters and brought him to Babylon and put him in prison until the day of his death.*

As a part of his punishment, Zedekiah was forced to watch the executions of the leaders of his regime.

He witnessed the executions of his secretary of defense (“overseer of the men of war”), the princes of Judah, and his most trusted advisors.

Then, his sons were marched in front of him. He watched as they were killed. The Babylonians then immediately blinded him, ensuring that the last thing he ever saw was the assassination of his sons and the death of any hope that his kingly line would survive.

The Bible tells us that he was bound with bronze chains, marched to Babylon and placed in prison where he stayed until he died.

How long could he have possibly lived in prison? I can't believe King Zedekiah would have lived long after the horror he experienced in the fall of Jerusalem, the slaughter of his sons and his own cruel blinding and imprisonment.

The last chapter of Jeremiah reveals not only the punishment of the rebels, but the details of the sacking of Jerusalem.

City destroyed

The city set on fire (vv. 12-13)

[12] Now on the tenth day of the fifth month, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard, who was in the service of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. [13] He burned the house of the Lord, the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every large house he burned with fire.

Nebuzaradan, a special representative of Nebuchadnezzar, arrived in August following the fall of Jerusalem, which occurred a month earlier, in July. He was appointed to supervise the dismantling of the city.

First, he put it to the torch. All of the important buildings were set on fire - the Temple, the king's palace, and other government buildings.

From these structures the flames spread and consumed the entire city.

Then, the walls surrounding the city were “pulled down.”

Walls torn down (v. 14)

[14] So all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls around Jerusalem.

The verb, translated in my Bible “***broke down***” is literally “***to pull down***.” It is a significant word in Jeremiah.¹⁹

In Jeremiah 31:28, we are told that God Himself will “*pull Israel down*.”

The walls protecting Jerusalem were literally pulled down by the Babylonians. But we are to understand that it’s not just Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians who are destroying Jerusalem.

No, God is in it. This destruction is His judgment.

After describing the demolition of the city, the record concentrates on the methodical plunder of everything of value still left in the Temple after having already been plundered a decade earlier.²⁰

City looted of treasure (mainly bronze) (vv. 17-23)

Bronze pillars

[17] Now the bronze pillars which belonged to the house of the Lord and the stands and the bronze sea, which were in the house of the Lord, the Chaldeans broke in pieces and carried all their bronze to Babylon.

Here, the Bible emphasizes the enormity of two twenty-seven foot tall pillars that stood just outside the Temple. They were the work of Hiram from Tyre, an artisan hired by Solomon centuries earlier.

The two pillars were so imposing that they were actually named - “Jachin” and Boaz.” They were constructed of cast bronze, hollow inside but very thick,²¹ and were adorned with rich decorations at the top.

Bronze “sea”

[20]...the one sea, and the twelve bronze bulls that were under the sea, and the stands, which King Solomon had made for the house of the Lord—the bronze of all these vessels was beyond weight.

Within the Temple precincts there was also the “bronze sea.” This “sea” was a basin used for ceremonial washings associated with the sacrifices and offerings.

The sea was fifteen feet in diameter and seven and a half feet deep, all cast in bronze - and three inches thick! In 1 Kings 7:26 we are told that this basin held two thousand “baths” a unit of measure equaling about five gallons. Yep. It held ten thousand gallons of water. It was big and it rested on the backs of twelve bulls, also cast in bronze.²²

Other items

[19] The captain of the guard also took away the bowls, the firepans, the basins, the pots, the lampstands, the pans and the drink offering bowls, what was fine gold and what was fine silver.

Other items are listed here, all of them used in the sacrifices and offerings. All of them bronze.

The point of this listing is that the Babylonians have fallen heir to an incredible amount of bronze.

²¹ Their thickness was “four fingers” - Thompson says that this means one quarter of a handbreadth, or a little bit less than one inch.

²² These twelve bronze bulls had been removed in Assyrian times - a century earlier - and sent to the Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser. (2 Kings 16, 17) But it is a good bet that the bulls were replaced since they were a regular part of the temple equipment - plus, the sea had to be supported in some way.

¹⁹ In chapter one, Jeremiah was commissioned to “***pull down***” kingdoms.

²⁰ This earlier plundering (605 BC) was also by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.

And bronze being useful for all kinds of things military, they had every reason to transport all of it back to Babylon for use back home.

They broke the pillars and the bronze sea into pieces and smashed the twelve bronze oxen. They then loaded all this along with the items used for sacrifices in wagons and carted it all back home to Babylon.

But bronze wasn't the only treasure accompanying the Babylonians on their journey home. They were taking human plunder as well.

Deportation (vv. 15-16, 28-30)

Those left behind (v. 16)

[16] But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen.

Not all of the Jews were deported. Some were left behind. And the people left behind were the weakest members of society, people who would not be tempted to re-build anything or to rebel against Babylon.

They were left behind to work fields and vineyards for the benefit of the Babylonians. So, the city was not completely depopulated.

But the rest were placed in a long line to travel a "trail of tears" from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Taken to exile (vv. 15, 28-30)

[15] Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away into exile some of the poorest of the people, the rest of the people who were left in the city, the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon and the rest of the artisans...

As the passage continues (vv. 28-30), we find out that there were actually three separate deportations to Babylon.

- 1st - 598 - in Nebuchadnezzar's 7th year - 3,023 people
- 2nd - 587/586 - Nebuchadnezzar's 18th year - 832 people
- 3rd - 582 - Nebuchadnezzar's 23rd year - 745 (this passage)

That totals 4600 people - which is NOT a lot of people!²³

Despite the small numbers, judgment fell in a huge way. And at the end of the day, the walls protecting Jerusalem were gone, the magnificent Solomonic Temple was destroyed - its treasure headed for whatever use Babylon chose, and the people were totally demoralized.

Prior to this event, the Jews of Jeremiah's day may well have thought, "*God will never discipline us - He loves us too much.*" But they found out that He would, indeed, discipline them - and that precisely because He loved them so much!

I hope we have all been convinced today that God was more than willing to bring the severest discipline on His people in Jeremiah's day to drive them to repentance, a repentance that would restore them and align them again with His desire to bless them.²⁴

And as we close out our time this morning, we should all be equally convinced that God is willing to bring severe discipline on us, His people in 2010, and for the same reason.

He desperately loves us and He will go to great lengths to drive us to holiness, to repentance, and to a righteous walk with Himself.

²³ The exactness of the figures suggests an authentic counting, but it is possible that the numbers represent only the adult males and not the entire population. Or perhaps these were the leaders of the people, with the total of those deported numbering closer to 15-20,000. The small number of exiles may further be explained by a combination of factors, including: (1). the need to leave enough Jews behind to work the vineyards; (2). the thousands lost in the siege; and (3). the large numbers of people who may have died on the way to Babylon.

²⁴ Despite the severity of this discipline, it was with a redemptive purpose in mind. God sent His people into exile so that they would turn to Him there, which they did, and return to the Promised Land to live faithfully. That promise of a future blessing is even hinted at in the final verses of Jeremiah 52 where the next Babylonian king, Evil-merodach, brought Jehoiachin out of prison (where he had been living for thirt seven years!) and exalted him over all the other kings being held captive in Babylon.

Perhaps you have heard someone say, “*The Old Testament is all about judgment. The New Testament is all about grace.*” Or, “*The Old Testament God is a vengeful God, while the God of the New Testament shows us a loving God.*”

Nonsense!

Over the years, I have become more and more familiar with the Old Testament and I am increasingly impressed with the love and the grace of God that comes shining through its stories.

And, while I would never downplay the love and grace that we find in the New Testament, God’s judgment and severity is obvious from Matthew to Revelation.

God is more than willing to judge and discipline Christians. Sometimes the discipline of God in our lives is instructive, and not necessarily corrective.

Judgment for the People of God Today

Life Experience

So, Exhibit A validating God’s willingness to discipline His people would be the experiences that come our way, each and every one of which God can and does use to get our attention and to draw us to Himself.

The Holy Spirit will grab our attention through a meaningful time in prayer, careful reading of the Bible, healing or sickness, job loss or an increase in pay, the rebuke of a friend or strong church discipline - a topic we will explore next Sunday.

He will use everything to discipline/train us [*Hebrews 12:10*]... so that we may share His holiness.²⁵

²⁵ The entire passage is powerful: [*Hebrews 12:7*] *It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? [8] But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. [9] Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? [10] For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us*

The Judgment Seat of Christ

But the negative side of judgment is surely seen, too. As Exhibit B, I urge you to spend some time soon looking at the following passages from the pen of the Apostle Paul:

- Romans 14:1-12
- 1 Corinthians 3:10-15
- 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

All three of these major passages are concerned with the theme of believers’ judgment at an event called The Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Judgment Seat of Christ (also referred to as the *Bema*):

- occurs after this life is over;
- does not threaten the eternal salvation of the believer; but
- does promise that Christians will be judged for the deeds they have done in the body, “*whether good or bad.*” (2 Corinthians 5)

Christians today can no more lead a life of sin with impunity than could the Jews of Jeremiah’s day. God says that there will be a judgment which will result in reward for faithfulness and a loss of reward for sin.

Spiritual Leprosy

There is one final way I will mention today in which I believe God shows us His willingness to bring discipline our way, and it may be the most sobering of His judgments.

Harkening back to the beginning, Exhibit C of God’s discipline comes in the form of spiritual leprosy.

The disease of leprosy destroys physical health by eliminating pain sensors, which would warn a person of dangerous activity. Insensitive to pain, though, the leper damages himself.

for our good, so that we may share His holiness. [11] All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

I have come to the firm conviction that for the Christian, health before God consists of anti-leprosy - acute spiritual sensitivity.

The healthy Christian has a soft heart toward God.

When he strays from obedience, he feels the sharp pain of having sinned - and he deals with that pain by honest, heartfelt confession. When she sins, it hurts, she knows it, acknowledges it, and repents.

That's the way you and I are to deal with sin.

But what happens when the believer disobeys, experiences the pain of conviction from the Holy Spirit, and does NOT turn to the Lord with confession and repentance? Two things.

One, it will be easier to sin the next time temptation rises. Two, it will be more difficult to confess and repent.

If that lack of repentance continues, it will become a pattern. If it becomes a pattern, a callus will build on that Christian's heart, making him or her INsensitive - the exact opposite of health.

And the judgment of God, the discipline of God, is His willingness to allow us to become insensitive. Like a spiritual leper, we can end up doing serious damage without the protection of pain.²⁶

If you are experiencing pain because of damaging choices you have made, great! You have experienced the discipline of God in your life. Respond to that pain with confession and turn from your sin and enjoy a deep, rich walk with God.

And if you have made choices in recent days to disobey God - you have avoided time with Him, behaved immorally, lacked integrity, gossiped, told a lie, etc... - and have not experienced the pain of conviction, you have also experienced the discipline of God. And yours is a more severe discipline.

The discipline of not feeling pain means that God is allowing a callus to form over your heart.

And the only remedy for that condition is to beg Him to scrape your heart free of hard callus so that you can feel the redemptive, protective pain of conviction again.

Jeremiah has proven to us that God is willing to discipline His children. But Jeremiah and the rest of Scripture assures us that the purpose behind His discipline is that we might turn to Him, be restored, become useful and enjoy a rich, vibrant life before Him.

²⁶ In the first chapter of Romans, Paul describes "*the wrath of God*" (1: 18) as His willingness to remove His hand from people's lives who are intent on rebellion. He "*gives them over*" (1:24, 26, 28) to increasing depravity. While He never stops working in the life of His child, He does allow us to stray and to quench His Spirit's fire. This, I suggest, is among His sternest disciplines.