

Strengthened by Hardship

Scripture Reading — Hebrews 12:7-11

*No discipline seems pleasant ... Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness ...
Hebrews 12:11 —*

My wife is an avid gardener. Early in spring, she plants vegetable seeds in tiny pots indoors, safe from the freezing temperatures outside. The young plants grow until they can be safely transplanted outdoors.

To prepare for their move to the garden, my wife will “harden” the plants. This means that on warm, sunny days she brings them outside for a few hours so that they can slowly adjust to the sun and wind.

This process of hardening reminds me of a biosphere that was designed in Arizona years ago. The idea was to create an indoor environment that had perfect conditions for growing fruit. Scientists expected the trees to produce the best fruit ever seen, but something unanticipated happened: before the fruit fully developed, it fell to the ground. The “ideal” conditions of the biosphere did not include wind! Without the hardening effect of wind, tree branches were unable to bear the weight of ripening fruit, so they broke.

Today’s Bible reading indicates a parallel in spiritual discipline. When believers experience times of challenge and suffering, those painful realities can yield a “harvest of righteousness.” God doesn’t take delight in our pain, but he does use it for our spiritual benefit. If you are suffering, trust that the Lord will use that to make you a stronger, more fruitful Christian.

Prayer

Lord, sometimes it’s hard to connect our suffering to your goodness. Give us faith to believe that you can produce fruit in our lives through the difficulties we face. Amen.

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