

Sermon preached by Rev Chris Moroney at the Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral,
Sydney on Wednesday 31st October 2007. Reading: Hebrews 12:1-17
Topic: "The Quest for Spiritual Healing"

There are many different aspects of spiritual needs. There can be three main areas that come to mind. We can suffer from difficult circumstances. We may suffer from oppression, which may be verbal or physical or even emotional. We may endure persecution or discrimination. It may be that we have lost our job, or have been asked to move out of our house. The world may seem to be against us. And we may wonder what is going on in our lives. What is God doing in our situation? Why has he allowed all this to happen?

Secondly, we may feel unwell. We may be suffering from a physical illness. It could be short term or long term. We may feel that it is either, something that may pass. Or it may be that we feel that it could be life threatening. As a result we may feel spiritually drained and worn out, even uncertain. And we may be here tonight to look to God for help and healing.

Thirdly, we may feel that our own **spiritual health is not good**. We may have lots of doubts and fears. We may have begun to question the things we used to hold dear. We may feel that we are in danger of throwing in the towel as a Christian, afraid that our spiritual illness may be fatal. And in all these cases, people look for solutions, in the bookshops, on the internet, among friends and in the Bible.

1 We are not alone

As people who struggle with life, with difficulties, with illness and spiritual questions, we are not alone. That is why God has given us his word to guide and encourage us.

The people to whom the letter of the Hebrews was written were people just like us with struggles and questions. We do not know all their circumstances, but we do know that they needed the encouragement especially of Hebrews 12:12-13

"Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, [13] and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed."

They were struggling spiritually. They needed spiritual guidance and encouragement. They were struggling with persecution and hard times.

In Chapter 11 the author had taken them back to the people who trusted in God in the Old Testament times. They experienced horrific things in their lives, but they still kept the faith. Hebrews 11:37-40 (ESV)

The argument is that we who have a **New Covenant faith** are even better off than they were. If they could press on in the faith, with the limited knowledge of God's ways that they had, how much more should we press on in the faith with the extra knowledge that we have through the Lord Jesus. We are surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses, by looking back to their stand of faith in the midst of trouble, and we are encouraged to press on ourselves, in faithful and godly living.

We are not alone either in terms of our personal struggles with sin in our lives. We are tempted every day in all sorts of ways, and so often we just give in and give up. And our health, both spiritual and physical is bound to suffer, to the extent that we put up with sin as part of who we are, day by day. We can just get used to a certain level of godlessness in our lives, comforting ourselves that we may be better than someone else, perhaps even better than we used to be, but never as good as we could be, by the power of Holy Spirit.

See how strongly the writer puts the need to get rid of sin from our lives in this passage: *Hebrews 12:1 and 12:15-17* We must not tolerate sin in our lives. If you know it is wrong, put a stop to it today. It is not only threatening your own physical health, it is threatening your spiritual health as well.

The call to spiritual vitality must always be a call to spiritual holiness of life. But we must always remember that we cannot do it in our own strength. Because.....**2. Jesus makes all the difference in the world**

The Christian life is an endurance race, not a short sprint to the finish line. We are all called to endure, to persevere, to press on when the going gets tough. It is not just a matter of going along with the crowd and when the winds change or the fashions change we drift into something else. No the call to be a Christian is a call to be different from the world around us. In the same way that the world hated Jesus, we should not be surprised that the world will hate us, from time to time. After all, look what they did to Jesus. They nailed him to a tree. They put him to death in the most shameful way possible. And yet he did it for us, for you and for me. Hebrews 12:2 Jesus is both the example of faithfulness and the one through whom we can be granted forgiveness of our sins. He was faithful unto death, in obeying His heavenly Father in all things. Through his faithfulness, our faithlessness is overcome.

How can anyone get to heaven? How can anyone be right with God?

Only through a righteous life. Who's righteous life? Well, Jesus of course. Who else can say they never sinned? His perfect life becomes the basis for the forgiveness of sins for everyone who turns away from their sin, and puts their trust in Jesus. He took the punishment that we all deserve so that we can enjoy fellowship with God now and forever. Because of his victory over sin and Satan and death, he now rules the world. It is on that basis that we can pray to our Heavenly Father with confidence that he hears and answers prayer.

2 What is the effect of sin?

Sin spoils relationships. Sin separates us from God and from one another. Sin has led to the spoiling of the world so that now we experience sickness and turmoil and death. The effects of sin led to the death of the Lord Jesus. Sin leads to struggles in the lives of God's people, inner personal struggles and problems in relationships with other people. In the case of the readers of this letter it was physical persecution.

Lives and livelihoods were being threatened, as they are today in many parts of the world. But the question arises, in terms of spiritual struggle, what is God doing about my problems?

Why is he taking so long to heal me?

Why is he taking so long to mend the broken relationships?

Why is my personal conflict over faith issues so ongoing?

3 What is the value of discipline?

Part of the answer that the author wants to give us here is that the tough times help us to grow in our faith as Christians. He calls it discipline or training. Some of the most important lessons in life are the most painful to learn. The Lord God disciplines us like a father teaches his son or daughter. Hebrews 12:5-10 (ESV)

Sometimes we need to learn lessons the hard way. I cannot make progress in my own strength in my own time. God's strength is what I need. And his timing is perfect. We can know it in our heads, but through experience we sometimes learn it more deeply in our hearts.

At other times it is not until we have been through some painful situations that we have come to see how deep the hold of sin had become in our thinking and living. We had just got used to it. We needed a very big wake up call. But praise the Lord he does not give up on his children.

He rebukes and corrects and trains and disciplines those he loves. It is the testimony of many people here in the Healing Ministry that looking back, in the dark times, that God has been with them and teaching them important lessons. You can't always see it at the time. But such lessons are wonderful to behold. Such personal touches from the Lord God. That he would lead us at the right time in the right way to learn just what we needed to see and understand as part of our personal spiritual journey in Christian maturity and spiritual health.

4 Be healed

Therefore we come back to the start of the sermon, with verses

Hebrews 12:12-14 (ESV)

“Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, [13] and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.”