

Hebrews
God's Loving Discipline
Hebrews 12:4-6

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INTRODUCTION:

We have all seen it happen: a new believer, filled with joy, joins the church. At first, all is well and everyone rejoices in their salvation. But then a trial hits. It may be an illness, the loss of a job, a relational problem, or a financial crisis. The person starts missing church and avoiding those who try to make contact. Soon, they return to their worldly ways and are bitter against other Christians and even God.

What happened? There may be many factors involved, but a major cause of his spiritual failure was that he did not understand or respond properly to God's discipline. If he never repents and truly submits to God, he may be one of those represented by the seed sown on the rocky soil.

Luke 8:13 (NASB95)

¹³ Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.

The subject of "**God's loving discipline**" of His children is one of the most **essential** truths in the Bible for you to understand and apply. If you do not understand it, you will not persevere when trials hit, as they certainly will. As we have seen, the author of Hebrews is trying to prepare his readers to endure by faith a trial that seems to be approaching.

Hebrews 10:32-34 (NASB95)

³² But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, ³³ partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. ³⁴ For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

He reminds them of all the good things they have done in the past and exhorts them to "**run with endurance the race that is set before us**" by fixing their eyes on Jesus and His suffering. Then, in our passage this morning in chapter 12, he now explains the process of God's loving discipline of His children. The section runs through verse 11, but for sake of time we must only deal with verses 4-6.

We are not guaranteed a comfortable life in this world. God may choose to put us through trials and tribulation. In order to endure the Christian struggle against evil, we **must** understand what Scripture teaches about God's loving discipline.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Hebrews 12:4-6 (NASB95)

⁴ You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; ⁵ and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons,

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reproved by Him; ⁶ For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives.”

Prayer

BODY:

I. The Struggle Against the Forces of Evil.

Hebrews 12:4 (NASB95)

⁴ You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

The author shifts his metaphor from the marathon in verses 1-3 to a wrestling match in the arena. In ancient times, they did not have padded boxing gloves, such as boxers use today. Even with such gloves, boxers often inflict serious blows that result in severe bleeding, and sometimes even the death of their opponent. You would not want to get in the ring unless you were prepared to fight against a powerful enemy that was determined to bring you down.

When the author says that the Hebrews had not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood, he meant that none of them had as yet become martyrs. He says this against the backdrop of Jesus, who shed His blood on the cross. The implication is that they may be facing that ultimate test shortly. But whether they literally died for their faith or not, the imagery is clear: the Christian life is an intense life or death struggle against powerful forces of evil that could result in martyrdom. The author personifies sin as our opponent. It opposes us in two ways:

A. Sometimes the Enemy is the Evil in the World.

The author has just chronicled some of the terrible things that happened to God's Old Testament saints:

Hebrews 11:36-37 (NASB95)

³⁶ and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated

All of these things happened because evil men hated those who lived and proclaimed God's righteousness. As John 3:20 explained...

John 3:20 (NASB95)

²⁰ For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

If you live in obedience to God, your life reflects the light of Christ onto others' sinful lives. Jesus plainly warned...

John 15:19 (NASB95)

¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

B. Sometimes the Enemy is the Evil Within.

Paul explained it this way...

Galatians 5:17 (NASB95)

¹⁷ For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

Even though we become a new creation through faith in Christ, the powerful sinful desires of the flesh have not been swept away. The Hebrews were especially in danger of the sin of turning away from faith in Christ in the face of persecution. We all face that temptation, along with other sinful desires. But the point is, the Christian life is not a Sunday School picnic! It is an intense conflict with the forces of evil, both without and within.

C. Our Responsibility is to Resist Against Any Source of Evil.

Jesus plainly stated that the call to salvation is a call to lose your life:

Mark 8:34b-35 (NASB95)

...“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. ³⁵ For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

Remember, taking up your cross did not mean wearing a piece of jewelry. The man who took up his cross was on the way to execution. So Jesus was warning us up front that the call to follow Him was a call to engage in combat that at the very least meant putting to death our sinful flesh. It could also entail suffering even unto a martyr's death.

In light of those who were stoned, sawn in two, and put to death with the sword, as well as our Lord Jesus, who was crucified, your situation could be much worse than it is! It may come to shedding your blood, but at this point, you are not there. If you abandon faith in Christ under your present trials, what will you do when the blood starts flowing?

There is a practical lesson for us in this. Unless you are being horribly tortured and are facing execution for your faith, you can always find those who have it much more difficult than you do. If they endured in worse circumstances, then you can endure in your circumstances.

The author just exhorted us prior to our text in verse 3...

Hebrews 12:3 (NASB95)

³ For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Jesus did not deserve any suffering, much less death, in that He had no sin. By way of contrast, all of us deserve far more suffering than we actually receive if God were to repay us for every sin that we commit. So rather than complaining or shaking your fist at God for what you are suffering, consider Jesus, who suffered innocently on your behalf. Consider what **you** deserve, if God were to judge you for the way you actually lived. Endure by faith what God has allowed you to suffer, looking to Jesus.

Where do we gain the understanding that we need to endure God's loving discipline? The author goes on to show us that...

II. The Word of God Enables Us to Endure the Hardships.

The author continues...

Hebrews 12:5a (NASB95)

⁵ and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons,

Then he cites from Proverbs.

Proverbs 3:11-12 (NASB95)

¹¹ My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord Or loathe His reproof, ¹² For whom the Lord loves He reproveth, Even as a father *corrects* the son in whom he delights.

The point here is that the author cites this Scripture and says that it is addressed directly to his readers as God's sons. The text, of course, also addresses **all** of God's "sons" (or children). The Bible teaches that **none** are God's children by natural birth, but only by spiritual birth through faith in Christ. Paul wrote...

Galatians 3:26 (NASB95)

²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

If you are not a child of God through faith in Christ, **then you are not under God's loving discipline**; you are under His wrath and judgment. So you must begin by believing in Christ as your Savior from God's judgment.

Do you remember where our faith comes from?

Romans 10:17 (NASB95)

¹⁷ So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

It is through scripture that we can hear God speaking to you and provide encouragement and correction.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NASB95)

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

If you have never studied scripture enough to learn it or if you are not practicing what Scripture teaches, the result is the same: you will not apply it to your daily life. When

trials hit, you will respond in accord to your earthly knowledge, but you will not react as the Bible teaches you to respond.

Finally, let us look at what these verses teach about God's discipline.

III. God Disciplines All of His Children with Love.

Hebrews 12:5b-6 (NASB95)

...“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reproved by Him; ⁶ For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives.”

Note four things about God's discipline:

A. We must Understand How God's Discipline Differs from His Punishment.

God's **punishment** stems from His **wrath** against sin, whereas His **discipline** stems from His **love** for His children. **Punishment** is God acting as **Judge**. **Discipline** is God acting as our **Father**. Under **punishment**, the sinner pays for his sins. Under **discipline**, Christ paid for our sins. **Punishment** is God's demand for justice. Under **discipline**, justice is not in view, since Christ paid it in full for us. Rather, God intends to correct our faults and sins and to develop holiness in us.

Sometimes, God's discipline is directly related to a specific sin in His children. But at other times, it is not the consequence of a specific sin, but rather is to develop growth and maturity. While discipline does not necessarily remove the consequences of our sin—we still reap what we sow—God often tempers it with grace if we repent. If we do not repent, His discipline can be very severe (referred to as “**scourging**”), even to the point of physical death.

B. We Must not Regard God's Discipline Lightly.

To regard God's discipline lightly means to shrug it off as fate or bad luck. It is to fail to see God's personal care in **all** that happens to us, from the trivial to the significant. Nothing happens to us by chance. God controls every detail of our lives, down to the very hairs of our head being numbered. If a believer encounters a trial and responds negatively, he is regarding God's discipline lightly. If he grits his teeth and endures it without seeing God's loving hand in it, he is regarding it lightly. If he does not take the trial to heart by prayerful self-examination, asking God to help him grow through it, he is regarding it lightly.

It seems that it is easier to see God's hand behind the **major events** that hit us more than when **minor frustrations** occur. When the minor hassles of life occur, it is very easy to regard God's discipline lightly. For example, Why does it always seem that when we are late for an appointment that the traffic is worse than usual? Rather than seeing this as God lovingly giving me an opportunity to develop patience, I fume at the traffic jam. Or, If I have **way** more **work** to do than **time** to get it done why do I come down with a cold? Rather than seeing God's hand in this, I am thinking, “Great! How am I going to get everything done?” It may be car trouble or an irritating encounter with a pushy sales clerk. To grow in godliness, you must see **every** trial as God's loving discipline, specifically tailored to you as an opportunity to trust Him. Do not regard these trials lightly!

C. We Must not Lose Heart When He Reproves Us.

To faint under God's discipline is to grow weary of it and lose heart. To faint is to become depressed and hopeless, as if God has abandoned us. As the author goes on to show, our trials are actually **evidence that God loves us** and that we are His children. But the person who faints has lost sight of this. He is self-focused, absorbed with his trials to the extent that he cannot see God's purpose and perspective in the trial. Remember how Joseph reacted when his brothers hated him and sold him into slavery. He took a Godly view. Through it all he found favor with Pharaoh and became second only to him in Egypt. Here is how he responded to his brothers.

Genesis 50:20 (NASB95)

²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

Finally,

D. God's Discipline is Always Administered Through Love.

Hebrews 12:6a (NASB95)

⁶ For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines,

You may ask, "Doesn't God love everyone?"

The biblical answer is, "Yes! But not in the same way." To use an analogy, we may love kids. But the plain fact is, we tend to love our **own** kids more than we love the others. God loves **His children** in a special way also. One way that He manifests that love is to discipline us.

When someone else's kids are misbehaving, we generally will not discipline those kids. But because of our love for our own, we discipline them when they misbehave. We discipline them because we love them and want them to learn to submit to proper authority. Sometimes we I blow it because we discipline them out of our irritation or anger. But God, as our **heavenly** Father, never makes a mistake. He **always** disciplines us in love.

Hebrews 12:10 (NASB95)

¹⁰ For they (our earthly fathers) disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He (God) disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

Hebrews 12:6b (NASB95)

...And He scourges every son whom He receives."

Sometimes, as the word "**scourging**" indicates, His discipline can be very severe. But notice whom He scourges: "**every son whom He receives.**" This includes godly sons who walk closely with Him, as well as irresponsible sons who are immature in their faith.

But here is where we must exercise faith. When God brings severe discipline into your life, the devil will whisper to you, "So **that** is how your loving Father in heaven treats you, huh?" If he can get you to doubt God's love or His sovereignty over your situation, he has succeeded in driving you away from your loving Father.

CONCLUSION:

We must have endurance in order to fight against the forces of evil. If you are a child of God, He will discipline you for your own good because He loves you. We must not regard his discipline lightly but acknowledge that it is a stepping stone for us to draw closer to God.

Think of Joseph, enslaved in a foreign land because of his treacherous brothers, imprisoned because he did the right thing in resisting the advances of a married woman. He could have bitterly doubted God's love and care, especially during the two years when the cupbearer forgot to mention his situation to Pharaoh. But by faith Joseph clung to the love of God and to His sovereign goodness over every circumstance. Joseph's trust and submission to God through his trials is an example for us of how to respond to God's loving discipline.

Someone wisely said, "Do not interpret God's love by your circumstances. Rather, interpret your circumstances by God's love!" **Repeat**

What a Day That Will Be!