

His Loving Discipline Hebrews 12:4-13

Because He loves us, God our Father disciplines us so that we might increasingly reflect His character and enjoy His fellowship.

Definition of Discipline: “Training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character” (Webster’s).

When God disciplines, the purpose is that our character conforms to His. He wants us to fulfill our purpose for life, which is to reflect and proclaim Him. In order to do that, we need to be transformed.

Forces against discipline: Sin and immaturity

How is discipline different from punishment?

The purpose of punishment is retributive rather than corrective. For example, capital punishment is not corrective for the person who receives it. It might be corrective for others as they observe it, but the dead person receives no benefit from it. It is truly a punishment.

On the other hand, removing privileges or spanking a child is a form of discipline, designed to train that child to know what is right and what is wrong. It is not meant to “pay back” the child for his sin, but instead to train him or her to be a responsible and mature adult.

How is discipline different from abuse?

Abuse centers on the anger of the parent. It’s a response designed to vent the parent’s anger, even if in the process it hurts the child or is counterproductive to the child’s development.

Fatherly discipline is different in that it requires temporary pain at times, but the pain is always in the best interest of the child. It doesn’t seek to hurt, but instead to help the child grow.

What constitutes good discipline?

- Clear expectations (Dt 27-30)
- Clear consequences – what will happen if you obey? What will happen if you disobey?
- Consistent enforcement
- After the discipline, there is a reassurance of love and restoration (Hosea 11:1-11 – God called his “son” (Israel) out of Egypt and loved him, even though he kept disobeying. Assyria would conquer Israel, but God could not give them up because He loved them as a son).

Where does grace fit in?

When discipline fails to bear fruit and the child continues in rebellion, then punishment and retribution is called for. When God disciplined His people, they were unable and unwilling to change and to obey. So He had a choice: destroy or find a way to forgive and transform. Through Jesus, He found a way to forgive, to enact punishment on His Son rather than on his people. That is grace. Without grace, we would all be worthy of retribution. So God doesn’t deal with us as our sin really deserves.

So we are forgiven and permanently called “sons” because we are in Christ. It is grace that makes us sons in the first place, and grace that keeps us as sons.

Now, discipline serves to train us to reflect our Father.

What means does God use to discipline us?

-Suffering (Hebrews 12)

-Conviction of sin through the Spirit (Gal 5:16ff) – those who listen to the voice of the Spirit will produce the fruit of the Spirit. Those who do not will produce the fruit of the flesh.

Passages: Hebrews 12:4-11

Key Points:

-Fathers discipline their sons if they love them. Fathers who do not discipline do not really love.

-God's discipline is perfect, in contrast to our earthly fathers. Earthly fathers do their best, but they fall short.

God's discipline can always be trusted.

-For Christians, discipline results in holiness and righteousness.

-Discipline is never pleasant at the time, but it bears pleasant fruit.

Main Idea:

God disciplines His children as a loving Father so we will grow to reflect His perfect character.

Submit to God's loving and fatherly discipline.

Subject: Discipline is never enjoyable when we're in the midst of it. It's not enjoyable for the parent or for the child. However, a good parent knows that it's necessary. A good parent sets boundaries and enforces consequences for transgressing the boundaries. Discipline is an expression of love – we want our children to grow up to be productive adults with strong moral character.

As we talk about our relationship with God as our Father, then, we have to talk about the subject of discipline. Just like human parents discipline their children, God disciplines us as His children. Just like it's never fun in our relationships with our human fathers, discipline is never fun in our relationship with God.

Need: Yet it's necessary. The purpose of our existence is to proclaim and to reflect God's character to the world. We were originally made in God's image, to be a living picture of His holiness and love and perfect character. As Christians, we proclaim the gospel, which demonstrates God's love and holiness, and we live in keeping with God's character so people can see who He is.

The problem is that we are sinful and unable to fulfill our purpose apart from God's intervention. We are sinful in ways we don't even understand. That's where discipline comes in. Through His Word, through His Spirit, and even through suffering, God rounds off our rough edges so that we can grow up.

Our responsibility in the process? Submit. Listen to what God is saying, and submit. Our temptation is to rebel, just as we are tempted to rebel against a human father. Our temptation is become bitter or defensive or to deny that we need to change. So we pray for soft hearts and receptive spirits.

Text: Hebrews 12:4-11 deals with the subject of the Father's discipline. The author urges us to submit to God's discipline, because His discipline is designed to lovingly transform us back into His image.

I. The motivation of discipline is love (12:4-8).

In the context of the Hebrew church, they wondered why they were suffering. The writer tells them that their suffering is one way in which God is disciplining them. He doesn't hate them, much as my own father didn't hate me. He disciplines from a motivation of love for them.

A parent who never disciplines doesn't really love.

Illustration: Kid at the mall who told me that his dad always gives him money when he wants it. Perhaps it wasn't true. If it was true, though, it's a tragedy. The father is not doing the son any favors.

One of the greatest and most tragic misconceptions about love is that when you love somebody, you never tell them they're wrong. Even in the evangelical Christian church, we have wrong-headed views when it comes to issues of discipline. Love does not mean accepting every one of a person's choices without comment or discipline.

God never does that.

Dt 27:18-19 – The nation of Israel was God's "treasured possession," His people called to be in a special relationship with Him.

But right after that statement, there is a list of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. The expectations and the consequences were crystal clear. God knew that trusting and obeying Him was best for them, so He initiated consequences and promises and discipline to train them to obey Him.

In fact, they didn't obey and were kicked out of the Promised Land. Over and over, they rebelled against the prophets and God disciplined out of love. Yet he also restored them from a heart of love.

Hosea 11 describes this juxtaposition of God's love and discipline.

11:1-4 – Israel is God's child, whom He taught to walk and redeemed from Egypt. Yet they kept rebelling.

11:5-7 – Because of their rebellion, they were cast out of the land and led away to Assyria.

11:8-11 – He would not permanently give them up, though. He would restore them because He loves them.

He disciplines and restores them because they are His beloved children.

Discipline for us occurs through God's Spirit, God's Word, and through suffering. He never leaves us where we are, because He loves us too much for that.

Illustration: Child who ran around the neighborhood naked. A parent who demonstrates love sets some boundaries for the good of the child!

God's discipline springs from His love. He wants us to know Him and to live out our purpose for our lives. He doesn't want us to self-destruct or to be less than He designed us to be.

It's critical to remember God's motivation because:

II. The means of discipline are painful (12:11).

This is, of course, the reason we generally don't appreciate discipline.

At times we experience the conviction of the Spirit (Gal 5:16ff). Sometimes that conviction comes directly, and sometimes through the Word of God (2 Tim 3:16-17). Although it's not external suffering, it's internal suffering. We feel uncomfortable and out of sync with God's purposes.

Psalms 32:3-5 – Hiding sin creates an internal pressure and discomfort, designed to bring confession and repentance. That is a form of discipline. As long as God's Spirit is convicting you, it means He is still working to transform you. If your conscience is seared, you're in big trouble.

Illustration: St. Augustine of Hippo, a 4th century bishop. "You made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." Augustine tried to find peace in philosophy, in rhetoric, in public speaking, and in indulging his lusts. He found it nowhere and was miserable.

"You saw me and it please you to transform all that was misshapen in me. Your goad was thrusting at my heart, giving me no peace until the eye of my soul could discern you without mistake. Under the secret touch of your

healing hand my swelling pride subsided, and day by day the pain I suffered brought me health, like an ointment which stung but cleared the confusion and darkness from the eye of my mind.”

That pain you feel inside when you lie, when you look at pornography, when you are unkind, when you cheat or sin in any way, that pain is God’s discipline. He is using it to transform you. It hurts but it’s a healing hurt.

Illustration: Having a bone set – it hurt so badly. I wanted the doctor to stop. But without that pain, my arm would still be unusable. Sometimes pain precedes health.

In addition to the Spirit’s conviction, God might even use suffering in our lives. That’s what the author of Hebrews mentions in chapter 12.

Sometimes God allows suffering because it trains us to change our attitude and behavior. Sometimes that suffering comes in the form of natural consequences.

Illustration: Paul Brand – why is leprosy so tragic – without pain to warn us, we injure or even kill ourselves. Pain is a natural warning system to keep us from certain activities. It won’t be necessary in the new heavens and the new earth, because there won’t be anything to harm us. In the present world, though, we need natural consequences.

Some suffering, however, is not a result of individual sin but instead stems from the fallen nature of the world. People die or get sick because the world is under the curse of sin. Even if God doesn’t cause suffering and death, He allows it and He uses it. **2 Cor 1:3-7** – God might allow us to suffer in order that we can be a comfort to others who suffer. He might allow it so we know specifically how to offer the hope of Christ to people who are in the same situation. Suffering shaves away our rough edges and immaturity if we allow God to use it in our lives.

Suffering as a form of God’s discipline shapes and transforms us in ways we don’t even know we need to be transformed. So although it’s painful, God is still in control. He uses even the painful experiences as a means of transformation.

Discipline hurts, but it’s indispensable in the Christian life. The only question is whether you and I will submit to it or not.

III. The goal of discipline is righteousness (12:10, 11b).

Illustration: Herb Brooks (Kurt Russell) in *Miracle*. He has them perform the same drill over and over and over again. “This cannot be a team of common men.” He wants them trained to work as a team and to work hard. They hate him in the moment, but when they win, they appreciate him.

He was training away their rough edges and laziness and selfishness, to make them a great team. That’s what a great coach does.

God is a perfect Father and a great coach. His goal in allowing suffering and conviction into our lives is our righteousness and holiness. That’s it. It’s not because He hates us. He knows exactly what we need.

The result of discipline is the “peaceful fruit of righteousness.” We have peace with God and others, we have character that reflects His character. It doesn’t mean that our circumstances will always be perfect or that we won’t suffer or experience conflict. It means that we will be closer and closer to what God is calling us to be.

2 Cor 3:18 – We are being transformed into His image.

One thing that keeps us from responding well to discipline and instruction is that we don't understand the goal. It seems random or intrusive to simply say, "Don't lie" or "Restrain your sexual passions until marriage." If there's no goal for those commands, we are unlikely to submit to them.

However, the goal is to know God and to be like Him so others can know Him also. So we don't lie, because God doesn't lie. We are faithful in marriage, because God is faithful. And our goal for our lives is to be like our Father.

Conclusion

So how do we respond?

-In every instance of discipline, ask, "How do I need to change or grow?"

-Submit to God's discipline.

(Seek change, pray for strength, and persevere in the task). Don't give up! Don't rebel! Listen carefully to God's Word and God's Spirit as He trains you. You can make things hard or harmonious.

How is God training and disciplining you right now? What steps do you need to take to submit to that discipline in your life?