

The Discipline of God
Hebrews 12:4-11

This morning we are returning to our study of the Book of Hebrews. This book was written to a group of struggling Hebrew believers living in Rome who under a great persecution were actually being tempted to turn away from Christ and the Gospel of Christ so that they might be able to return to Judaism or some form of it.

The author of course was very troubled by this prospect and he therefore wrote this book, the Book of Hebrews, in order to counter this threat.

So how did the author, within the Book of Hebrews, go about doing that? He initially sought to counter this threat by seeking to strengthen their faith; first of all by emphasizing the superiorities of Christ in **Hebrews 1:1-10:39** and then secondly by emphasizing Old Testament examples of faith in **Hebrews 11:1-40**.

He then further sought to strengthen his readers faith by challenging his readers, in **Hebrews 12:1-3**, to run the race of faith that had been set before them with endurance, just as the Old Testament saints had run the race of faith that had been set before them with endurance and also just as Christ had run the race of faith that had been set before Him with endurance. And this is where we left off.

This now brings us to **Hebrews 12:4-11** and to a very important and potentially life-changing topic that we need to thoroughly understand. And what is this topic? The topic is “the discipline of God.” Now some of us when we think of "discipline" may think of punishment. But this would be a misleading characterization of the word “discipline.”

The word “discipline” (PAIDEIA) comes from the root word “child” (PAIS) and denotes the **training** of a child. And this is how we should primarily think of God's discipline.

So when God disciplines us or in other words, allows suffering to come into our lives, how should we view that suffering? We should view our suffering as God's discipline or in other words as His attempt to train us and to bring us to full maturity.

Would this include “all” of our sufferings? Yes! Absolutely! What does **Romans 8:28** tell us? It tells us this, “**And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.**” So if God is causing all things to work together for good to those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose, would this include “all” of our sufferings? Yes!! Of course it would.

So how should we view our sufferings, even when they are most severe? We should view them as God’s discipline or in other words as His attempt to train us and to bring us to full maturity. **So just to help you better understand how God might use our sufferings to train us, I am now going to share with you a few of those ways:** (1) He might use our sufferings to correct us and to bring us back to the path of righteousness as He did with King David after his sin with Bathsheba, as recorded for us in 2 Samuel 11-12. (2) He might also use our sufferings to prevent us from wandering off the path of righteousness as He did with Paul when He afflicted Paul with a “thorn in the flesh” in order to keep Paul from exalting himself as recorded for us in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. (3) And He will also most certainly use our sufferings to educate us about ourselves as well as about Himself as Job captured so very well in His confession to God recorded for us in Job 42:1-6.

So when we are suffering let us not waste those sufferings but rather let us ask God to use suffering to train us.

So I have already shared a great deal about God’s discipline but now let me ask you this question: Did the recipients of this letter understand what I have just shared with you about God's discipline and how God was using their sufferings to train them? No! They did not understand these things. For if they had understood these things their faith would not have been so severely shaken in the midst of their sufferings.

But because their faith was shaken, the author will now begin to speak to them about God’s discipline in **Hebrews 12:4-11** for the simple reason that they needed to understand God’s discipline much better.

And what is the question that we will be seeking to answer this morning from this text? The question that we will be seeking to answer is this:

What do we learn about God's Discipline in Hebrews 12:4-11? This is the question that we will be seeking to answer this morning.

So what is the first thing that hopefully we will learn? The first thing is this: Those who do not view and respond to God's discipline correctly will experience certain spiritual pitfalls (Hebrews 12:4-5). So let us now begin to examine Hebrews 12:4-5 and see if this is not so.

And we will begin with **verse 4**. And what does it say? It says this, **“You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin”** or in other words this author said to his readers that they had not yet had to die for their faith, as others had to die for their faith, including Christ whose death at the hands of sinners had just been highlighted in **Hebrews 12:1-3**.

So what was the author's point in stating this fact to his readers? Based on the context of the Book of Hebrews the author's point was this: Though they had suffered less than others, and more specifically had suffered less than Christ, they had struggled far more in respect to their faith, even though they had suffered less.

But why had they struggled far more in respect to their faith though they had suffered less? And the answer is given to us in **Hebrews 12:5**. **So now let me read this verse for you. And this is what it says,** “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.’”

So why had they struggled far more though they had suffered less based on **Hebrews 12:5?** **They struggled far more, though they had suffered less, because they were living as if they had forgotten the exhortation from Proverbs 3:11 that he quoted here in this verse.**

So why would this author tell the recipients of this letter that they had forgotten this exhortation? Was it because they presently had no knowledge of it? No! It is because the recipients of this letter had not

heeded the warnings contained in this exhortation concerning certain pitfalls associated with God's discipline.

So what were these pitfalls that Proverbs 3:11 had warned against but that the recipients of this letter had not heeded? This is the first pitfall: The recipients of this letter while being disciplined by the Lord had begun to regard His discipline **lightly** (Hebrews 12:5). This was the first pitfall that the recipients of this letter had actually stumbled into because they had not heeded the first warning that he quoted from Proverbs 3:11

God disciplines us to train us and to bring us to full maturity. Therefore when sufferings come into our lives we need to look at our sufferings in that way. For if we look at our sufferings in any other way we would be guilty of regarding the discipline of the Lord lightly or in other words we would be guilty of viewing God's discipline as having very little or no value.

And what would be the consequence of this? This would be the consequence: If we cannot look beyond our sufferings to what God is seeking to accomplish through our sufferings we will only be able to see our sufferings and the pain of our sufferings, when sufferings come upon us.

This is exactly what happened to the recipients of this letter. Rather than looking beyond their sufferings they were only able to look at their sufferings.

And how did that work out for them over time? Not very well at all. And this brings us to the second pitfall that the recipients of this letter were unable to avoid because they had not been able to view God's discipline correctly and had not responded to it appropriately. So what was this second pitfall?

The recipients of this letter while being disciplined by the Lord had actually become **faint** (Hebrews 12:5b). This is what the author told his readers at the end of **verse 6**.

So what did this mean? It means that their fixation on their suffering and the pain of their suffering, eventually wore them down, and had worn them down to such an extent that they had actually begun to contemplate turning away from Christ and the gospel of Christ to return to Judaism.

So even though Proverbs 3:11 had warned against the pitfall of fainting, when being reproved this is exactly what happened to the recipients of this letter.

But they wouldn't have, if they had viewed God's discipline correctly and responded appropriately. In fact if they had viewed God's discipline correctly and had responded appropriately they would have been blessed.

And this brings us to the second thing that this author wanted his readers to learn about God's discipline in our passage this morning. And what was it that this author wanted them to learn? It was this:

Those who view God's discipline correctly and respond appropriately will hopefully in the midst of their sufferings be assured of certain very important spiritual realities (Hebrews 12:6-8). And where do we find these spiritual realities? We find them in Hebrews 12:6-8.

So what is the first spiritual reality that the author mentioned in these verses? Those who view God's discipline correctly and respond appropriately will in the midst of their sufferings be assured that God loves them (Hebrews 12:6a). So how can we be assured of this?

Let me now read for you the beginning of Hebrews 12:6 as the author continued to quote from Proverbs 3, but this time he will be quoting from Proverbs 3:12 and what does it say? It says this, **“For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines.”**

So if we are today suffering or in other words suffering God's discipline, should we question God's love for us? No! Absolutely not but rather we should be assured of this wonderful spiritual reality that we are in fact loved by God.

But this is not the only, very important spiritual reality that we should be assured of when we are in the midst of suffering there is still another, and what it? It is this:

Those who view God's discipline correctly and respond appropriately will also hopefully in the midst of their sufferings be assured that they are in fact one of God's children (Hebrews 12:6b-8).

So how we know this? We know this because of what the author told his readers in **verse 6** as the author completed his quote from **Proverbs 3:12**. And what did He say? He said this, **“(6)... He scourges every son whom he receives.”**

So who is being scourged in this verse? He is scourging every son whom He receives. So when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior by grace through faith and are received by Him, we can be assured of this, that we are in fact one of His children, for if we were not, he would have no reason to scourge us. And doesn't this make sense. Fathers don't discipline other people's children they discipline their children.

So how severe can God's discipline of His children become? His discipline can become extremely severe. How do we know this? All we have to do is to consider the word “scourges.”

The word “scourges” (MASTIGOO) in Hebrews 12:6 refers to **flogging** with a whip. It was a severe and extremely painful beating.

So how severe can God's discipline of His children become? It can become extremely severe but even so what spiritual reality should we always be assured of? We should always be assured that we are in fact one of His children.

And just to drive this point home even further, he then in essence in **verses 7&8**, repeated the same thought that he had just put forward in **verse 6** but this time will do so with a little different twist.

So how did he begin? He began in **verse 7** by saying this, **“It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as sons”** (which is in essence the same thought that He has already shared but now he will begin to introduce the twist and he does this by asking a question. And what is the question? It is this, **“for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?”**

And now he will answer the question. And what did he say? He said this, **“But if you are without discipline, of which all have partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.”**

So when we are in the midst of discipline should begin to question that God loves us or that we are in fact one of His children? No! Rather when are in the midst of discipline we should be assured of both of these spiritual realities.

So what else can we learn about God's discipline from our passage this morning? Those who view God's discipline correctly and respond appropriately will be benefitted in extraordinary ways. So how will they be benefitted? First of all ...

They in subjecting themselves to God in the midst of their sufferings will “live” (Hebrews 12:9-10).

Let me now read for you **Hebrews 12:9** and see if this is not so. And what does it say? It says this, **“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?”**

So according to this author how would these readers be benefitted, if they in viewing God’s discipline correctly, did in fact submit themselves to God in the midst of their suffering? The author told his readers that they would in fact what? He told them that they would in fact live!!

So what does this mean? When we subject ourselves to God or in other words, subject ourselves to “The Father of Spirits” in the midst of our sufferings we are in essence given our lives up to God as a living sacrifice. And what will happen to us as we do that?

This is what will happen. If we are truly a child of God and the Spirit of God that indwells in us, God will fill us and His life will begin to flow through us.

This is why Paul was able to say in Galatians 2:20 **“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me.”**

So how will God's life manifest itself through us as we subject ourselves to Him in all things? He will manifest His life in many different ways. But one way that he most certainly wants to manifest His life through us is through holiness. So do we want to truly live and to enter into the abundance of the life that Christ came to give? Then what do we have to do? We must subject ourselves to God in all things including His discipline of us.

How do we know this? Let me read for you **Hebrews 12:10**, and this is what it says, **“For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share his holiness.”**

And this thought brings us to a second extraordinary benefit that will be enjoyed by those who view God's discipline correctly and are willing to subject themselves to God in the midst of their sufferings. So what is this second extraordinary benefit? It is this:

They in subjecting themselves to God in the midst of their sufferings will be also experience “the fruit of righteousness” (Hebrews 12:11). And where will we see this in our text? We see it in **Hebrews 12:11**.

So how does this verse begin? It begins like this, **“All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful...”** This seems pretty obvious.

All discipline, whether inflicted by human fathers or by God, is unpleasant while it is in process. This is the bad news. But the good news is this. When that discipline is over the value of that discipline will be able to be clearly seen.

And what is the value that will be clearly seen when the discipline is over? Let me now read for you the rest of the verse, **“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.”**

So what is the extraordinary benefit of God's discipline if we view God's discipline correctly and respond appropriately? We will experience “the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” In other words when the tumultuous process of God's discipline is over we will be able to see far more clearly the

manifestation of God's Holy life both in terms of who we are as well as how we live.

CONCLUSION

So how should we view our sufferings in light of what we have learned today? Should we regard our sufferings lightly or in other words treat our sufferings as if they have no or little value. This obviously would be a grave mistake for not only will that open up the door for us to be worn out by our sufferings but it will rob us of the opportunity to grow closer to God and to experience God in a way that would be impossible apart from our sufferings. So let us not waste the opportunities that God's discipline of us provides.

May God give us the grace when we are in the **midst of sufferings** to view our sufferings correctly and to respond appropriately.