



⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

^f“My son, ⁸do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.

⁶ For ^hthe Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. ⁱGod is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, ^jin which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to ^kthe Father of spirits ^land live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, ^mthat we may share his holiness. ¹¹ ⁿFor the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields ^othe peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

This morning we are talking about discipline and I don't think there is any more relevant type of parental discipline than [this example](#). (Video of a father shooting his rebellious daughter's laptop with a .45 handgun. Please note—this video contains significant profanity. Skip ahead to 7:05 to see the actual incident and to avoid the profanity.)

Now that is some serious parenting! If you saw the entire video I think you would agree that the daughter got what she deserved. Thankfully, our Heavenly Father does not give you and me what we deserve, because what we deserve is eternal condemnation. But for the believer who has

placed their faith in Christ, God is merciful in not giving us what we do deserve and he is full of grace in giving us what we do not deserve—eternal fellowship with him. But this infinite grace and mercy does not mean that our Heavenly Father does not employ discipline. He does discipline us and it is one of his greatest gifts to us. This is what we are going to learn about this morning.

I love how this section begins. *In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.* This is kind of a transition verse between the “cloud of witnesses” in chapter eleven and the subject of discipline in chapter twelve. As these Jewish believers were fixing their eyes on Jesus and engaged in a struggle against sin, none of them had yet shed their blood. Many of the witnesses from chapter eleven were full martyrs in the sense that they died for their faith but to this point in history, none of the readers had been killed for their faith. In other words he was saying, “You may have had hardships, but no one has died yet.”

You could read this in a crass manner and think that this was not necessarily the most pastoral way of handling their suffering. It’s like he was saying, “Oh come on. Quit your whining. You aren’t dead yet for heaven’s sake! Not one of you has been sawn in two. No one has been run through with a sword.” I don’t think the author was chastising them or mocking them in any way, rather it was both a word of encouragement and probably a word of warning. It had not happened yet, but it was bound to come.

Speaking of encouragement, this is how the author introduces the topic of discipline. *And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”*

This is a quote from Proverbs chapter three and the author assumes that his readers would not have forgotten this passage. This is worth mentioning because what the author has done here is to assume a pretty high degree of Biblical literacy. This is more reasonable considering he is writing to Jewish believers. Non-Jewish believers would not have much Biblical literacy at all. However, he may not be talking about forgetting in the sense that the information did not stick in your long term memory but rather the type of forgetting that does not put truth into practice. This is what James said in his letter. *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like* (James 1:23-24). This is the kind of forgetting that you and I usually have. Intellectually, we know God’s truth. It is in our brain. It has not actually left our neural pathways, but if we do not practice the truth, it is like we have forgotten it.

Imagine if you forgot your wife’s birthday and the next day she came to you and she was both very hurt and fuming mad at you and says, “I can’t believe you forgot my birthday! What kind of monster are you?!” So you try to calm her down by saying, “No, honey, I didn’t forget when your birthday was, I simply chose not to celebrate it.” How do you think that excuse is going to go over? This is what God thinks of our excuses when we hear his Word and don’t put it into practice. It is like we are saying to him, “No, Lord, I did not forget your Word, I simply chose not to put it into practice.”

As I said a moment ago, this quote from Proverbs about Godly discipline is meant to be received as an encouragement. If you have a NIV in front of you, it reads, “And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons.” However, if you are using any other translation, chances are it has the word exhortation instead of encouragement.

The Greek word translated as exhortation here in the ESV is translated as “encouragement” about 2/3 of the time and exhortation 1/3 of the time. The noun form of this word is *paraclete*, the name Jesus used for the Holy Spirit. Therefore we can conclude that discipline is both an encouragement and an exhortation.

I think we understand how discipline can be an exhortation, but how can it be a form of encouragement? Discipline is incredibly encouraging because it reminds us that we are sons and daughters of the king. Now if I were a son or daughter of an earthly king, I would be inclined to view my relation to the king in more material matters. For example, the fact that I live in a castle would be evidence of my sonship. The fact that I helped to rule over millions of subjects would be more evidence. I would almost certainly view my relationship to the king in terms of personal benefits to me. This is why we must see God’s discipline toward us, not as a punishment, but as a tremendous personal benefit to us. It is one of the chief evidences that we are his—that we belong to him.

One of my favorite quotes from C.S. Lewis is helpful at this point. This is from his book, *The Problem of Pain*.

Now just because the dog is by human standards one of the ‘best’ of irrational creatures, and a proper object for a man to love...man interferes with the dog and makes it more lovable than it was in mere nature.

In its state of nature it has a smell, and habits which frustrate man’s love; he washes it, housetrains it, teaches it not to steal, and is so enabled to love it completely. To the puppy the whole proceeding would seem, if it were a theologian, to cast grave doubts on the ‘goodness’ of man: but the full-grown and full-trained dog, larger, healthier and longer-lived than the wild dog, and admitted, as it were by Grace, to a whole world of affections, loyalties, interests and comforts entirely beyond its animal destiny, would have no such doubts. It will be noted that the man...takes all these pains with the dog, and gives all these pains to the dog, only because it is an animal high in the scale – because it is nearly so lovable that it is worth his while to make it fully lovable. He does not house-train the earwig or give baths to centipedes. We may wish, indeed, that we were of so little account to God that He left us alone to follow our natural impulses - that He would give over trying to train us into something so unlike our natural selves: but once again, we are asking not for more Love, but for less.¹

Lewis’ point here is the same as the author of Hebrews—if you want God to leave you alone and not discipline, what you would be asking for is less love. You would be asking for your Heavenly father not to treat you as your Father. You would be asking for him to do the unthinkable—to disown you.

Next we are given a comparison between our earthly fathers and our Heavenly Father. *Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.*

As we have all no doubt experienced, our earthly fathers disciplined us “as it seemed best to them.” Good parenting requires good, consistent discipline. Children both need and want consistent, loving discipline. There are three ways that parents can foster rebellion in their children—You can discipline them too little (permissiveness), too much (authoritarianism) or you can swing wildly between the two extremes. Children who are disciplined too little don’t feel that their parents care for them. Children who are disciplined too much or too harshly feel like they are being treated like a herd of cattle. And children whose parents swing wildly between permissiveness and authoritarianism never know when, if or how hard the hammer is going to fall.

Even though we parents make plenty of mistakes, the author of Hebrews is using the illustration of a well-intentioned parent. Even the best of parents discipline their children according to this standard—*as it seemed best to them*. After all, this is all you can ask from a parent. Certainly the parent is taking into consideration what the child needs at that moment, but in the end, their discipline needs to be applied to how it seems best to them.

But in contrast, our Heavenly Father *disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness*. In other words, He knows exactly *what* we need and *when* we need it. He does not discipline us because he is angry. He does not discipline us because out of condemnation. He disciplines *our good, that we may share his holiness*. God commands us to be holy as he is holy and he helps the process along through his loving discipline.

Some Christians have had neglectful or abusive fathers. This requires a special comment since it is quite natural to view our Heavenly Father is a similar way to our earthly fathers. Just as a good earthly father can teach you about your Heavenly Father—for that is your primary task as a Christian dad—so a poor earthly father can cloud your perception of your Heavenly Father. For this reason, some believers are in love with Jesus but if you are honest, God as your father does not sit well with you. In some cases, you may not even be completely aware of this problem.

If this in any way describes your background, the first thing you need to is make a clean break between your earthly father and God the Father. I want you to picture these two fathers separating as far as the east is from the west. They are not the same person. A Scripture that you should memorize is Romans 8:1. *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*. If you have placed your trust in Christ alone for salvation, if you cling to no one but Jesus and nothing but the blood of Jesus, then you, son, are “in Christ”. You, daughter, are “In Christ.” God the Father could no more condemn you than he could condemn his son, Jesus. *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*.

But let me take that one step further. Not only is God not capable of showing you condemnation, neither is he capable of showing you contempt. This may summarize what you felt from your own father—contempt. What you felt from him was far deeper than mere disappointment. God

the Father can become disappointed with our behavior just as we can grieve the Holy Spirit. We can trigger a divine sadness in the Godhead but never contempt. God cannot look at you and declare, “I may love you but I don’t like you right now.” His love and acceptance for us is not rooted in us or our behavior but rather in his perfect character, his eternal goodness and his blazing holiness. If you are in Christ, you are secure in Christ and a son or daughter of the king.

The next verse is one of the keys to understanding Godly discipline. *For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.* There is good news and bad news contained in this verse. The good news is that Godly discipline will bear fruit in our lives. Just as you plant seeds in the ground and they yield a harvest of grain, fruit or vegetables, so will the sowing of Godly discipline yield a harvest of holiness in our lives. But the bad news is that we possess the ability to kill the harvest. We have the potential to bring about discipline blight. Instead of a healthy, fruitful vine and a harvest of righteousness, we get dark, dead leaves and no fruit at all.

What makes the difference? Godly discipline *yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.* We can refuse this wonderful sanctification process in our lives if we are not trained by God’s discipline. In other words, discipline doesn’t always work, even when it comes from the perfect, loving, sovereign redemptive, purposeful discipline of a perfect Heavenly Father! Moreover, if you are not trained by it, you need to realize that all of the pain you experienced was wasted on you. This is where I got this morning’s sermon title—Don’t Waste Your Pain. If you are a son or daughter of the king, you will be disciplined, so why not make use of this discipline and be trained by it. It will be painful at times. Even our author admits as much. He says that discipline “feels painful at the moment” but like a woman giving birth, the pain is forgotten and counted as nothing when the new baby is born. Don’t waste your pain. Allow yourself to be trained by his work toward your holiness. It is for your own good.

A common question regarding this topic is this: How do I know the reason for my difficulties? How do I know if God is disciplining me or if the pain I am experiencing has a different purpose? Let me give you several Biblical reasons or purposes why we experience pain in this life and show how it relates to Godly discipline.

Satanic—*Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.* (1 Peter 5:8-9)

We give lip service to spiritual warfare but generally we do not take it seriously enough. Revelation 12:12 is another stark reminder. *Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.*” And since this was written almost 2000 years ago, the devil is well aware that the clock is ticking. His rage and fury increase with every passing day.

The glory of God—*Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you*

love is ill.”⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” (John 11:1-4)

Because God is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, he has purposes that are far beyond our understanding. Illness and even death can be used for his fame and glory. God can gain glory by delivering you from the difficult circumstances, like he did with Lazarus (though Lazarus had to die a second time, didn't he?) or he can gain glory by helping you persevere through the difficult circumstances.

Fallen world

- a. Creation groans—Romans 8:22—*For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. Sin has effected every molecule of creation and we are not exempt from its grunting and groaning.*
- b. Towers fall—Luke 13:4-5—*Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”* Natural disasters happen every day. People die of starvation, malnutrition and all manner of disease. Bad things happen because of the natural effects of sin.

Godly Discipline and holiness—Hebrews 12

One thing I didn't mention yet is that there are two kinds of discipline. Usually we think of discipline as being corrective, which it is, but there is also formative discipline. 2 Timothy 3 is the paradigm for this.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Word is used reproof and correction, which is corrective discipline as well as for teaching and training, which is formative discipline. Therefore, in this sense, God is disciplining us all the time. Every time you are disciplined does not mean that you are being disciplined for a specific sin. God is working all sin out of us and carving us into holiness.

Which of these four causes does God use for his loving discipline? God could use any of the other three as a means of discipline. God could allow one of Satan's attacks to bring you his discipline. He could use the natural state of the fallen world in which we live including birth defects, sickness, death, disability and many others. Therefore, every difficult circumstance that comes our way is probably a type of formative discipline or corrective discipline.

Here are four practical questions to ask during difficult times.

1. Is there a Satanic attack that I should resist?
God allows Satan to come after us but he still wants us to resist. We should discern if our difficulties are related to spiritual warfare or not.
2. Is there a sin I should confess?
Is all sickness and trials related to our individual sin? No, it is not but some of it is and we should always consider this possibility. I don't want you to obsess over it and fall into

the trap of thinking that God is just waiting in Heaven to lower the boom every time you sin. Don't obsess over you sin, just confess it.

3. Is there an illness for which I should pray for healing?
Again, God may want you to ask for healing or relief or he may want you to persevere through it.
4. Is there a lesson that the Lord wants me to learn?
The answer to this question is always YES. It would be good if we could get to the point where we don't even have to ask this question. If every difficulty we experience in life is a form or corrective or formative discipline from the Lord then of course he has something we are supposed to learn through it.

All of this fits perfectly with another beloved verse in Romans 8.

Romans 8:28—*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

I would like to close with a hymn written by John Newton the slave trader who also wrote Amazing Grace.

I Asked the Lord That I Might Grow
John Newton

I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace;
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek, more earnestly, His face.

'Twas He who taught me thus to pray,
And He, I trust, has answered prayer!
But it has been in such a way,
As almost drove me to despair.

I hoped that in some favored hour,
At once He'd answer my request;
And by His love's constraining pow'r,
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart;
And let the angry pow'rs of hell
Assault my soul in every part.

Yea more, with His own hand He seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe;
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

Lord, why is this, I trembling cried,
Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?
“‘Tis in this way, the Lord replied,
I answer prayer for grace and faith.

These inward trials I employ,
From self, and pride, to set thee free;
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou may'st find thy all in Me.”²

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^f Cited from Prov. 3:11, 12

^g Job 5:17

^h Ps. 94:12; 119:67, 75; Rev. 3:19

ⁱ Deut. 8:5; 2 Sam. 7:14; [Prov. 13:24; 19:18; 23:13]

^j [1 Pet. 5:9]

^k See Num. 16:22

^l [Isa. 38:16]

^m [2 Pet. 1:4]; See Lev. 11:44

ⁿ [1 Pet. 1:6]

^o James 3:17, 18

¹ C.S. Lewis. The Problem of Pain, © 1940.

² [John Newton](#), Olney Hymns (London: W. Oliver, 1779).