

God's Discipline for Us

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[0 : 00] Good evening, everybody. As Mark said, we'll be continuing from Hebrews, looking at chapter 12, verses 4 to 17.

Let me encourage you all to follow along in your Bibles. As we start, let me pray for us, asking the Spirit to help us, to guide us into all truth, helping us to live out what we have heard in His Word tonight.

Heavenly Father, as we come to Your Word, which is sharper than a double-edged sword, we ask that Your Spirit guide us into all truth.

Be with me as I speak, that the words may be pleasing to You. Help us understand that You, our Heavenly Father, give discipline in love ultimately for our good.

Help us to receive it and to be trained by it into holiness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, last week we heard from Mark about running the race, which was marked out for us to be perseverance in our faith.

[1 : 08] Tonight, in our passage, we have just heard that we're reminded that God disciplines those who He loves for the purposes of making us holy.

We are called to receive this discipline as a child receives their discipline from their parents. We are called to endure hardship as discipline. We will see how Christians should respond, especially in difficult times.

How we are to continue to run this race by trusting God. Struggles with sin, hardship, discipline. These are all heavy themes that come up from our passage tonight.

Often they have negative associations with them. For example, when was the last time you talked to someone, maybe over coffee or at work? Someone asked you something and you answered with, What's plans for the weekend?

Hardship. Or maybe at a job interview, How would you describe your greatest weaknesses? Struggles with sin. What do you want for Christmas this year?

[2 : 16] A discipline. I could see many of you nodding in agreement. It's true that none of us have these conversations, right? Because like most of you here, we would agree that our culture just doesn't like discipline.

We'll look at point one on your outline and verses four to nine. God disciplines those he loves. Here we're reminded that love and discipline aren't mutually exclusive.

And rather they go hand in hand. In fact, we can see specifically in verse six that God disciplines the ones he loves. He chastises everyone.

He accepts as his son. The author first begins with the example of Jesus himself, the son. And it's surprising, isn't it? But even God's very own son, Jesus, had to undergo some form of discipline.

Jesus, who was the very son of God, had to undergo the training of becoming made in the likeness of man. Specifically, Jesus underwent the discipline, which was the struggle against sin.

[3 : 23] Can you see in verse four? It is the process that Jesus himself had to go through to become fully perfected as the son of God.

Like Jesus, we too are disciplined. Unlike Jesus, however, we have not resisted to the point of shedding our blood or dying.

We are told not to grow weary and lose heart, even when we are disciplined by God. Because God is treating us like children.

And this is why we must go through discipline. Specifically here, there's this idea that discipline is our struggle with sin. We are reminded that in our spiritual race, we must run with perseverance.

And during this time, we are told to resist or put off the sins that may entangle us. We are told not to grow weary and to lose heart, even in spite of our trials.

[4 : 24] Rather, we are called to resist sin during this time. And the original audience had some serious struggles. Have a look at the verses which are on the screen.

They're from chapter 10, verses 32 to 34. They were facing many trials, including physical, social and political persecutions.

We, too, who are threatened constantly by sin, must continue to resist. The reason is God is treating us in the same way that He treated His Son, who was made like man.

He, who had no much greater struggle than any of us, still learned discipline by obeying the Father. In the same way, for us, then, it is to endure suffering as discipline.

Realize that this is our training for proper sonship. Unlike Jesus, we have not resisted to the point of shedding our blood or dying. Our temptations are much less than His in that sense.

[5 : 29] But whatever you are struggling with at the moment, your struggle cannot be greater than Jesus. Therefore, resist sin. God disciplines those He loves.

If we're receiving the discipline from God now and finding it hard to continue to resist sin, it really means that we are His children. He disciplines us as His children, first and foremost, because He loves us as His children.

Look at verses 5 and 6 with me. Here we are reminded that God disciplines us as His children, and we shouldn't make light or lose heart when He rebukes us.

The original audience needed to be reminded of this quotation from Proverbs 3.11, which is also on the screen. They needed to be reminded that it was expected for Jewish fathers to discipline their children, and for their children to receive this discipline.

We also need to be reminded, don't we, that God is our Heavenly Father, disciplining us out of His love for us. So have a look at that verse.

[6 : 37] My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one He loves. He chastises everyone He accepts as His son.

In fact, it is through good intentioned discipline that we can truly know that we are loved. For example, when we as a child do things that are dangerous or wrong, it would be unloving to not correct them or tell the child to go the right way.

For example, if a child wants to cross a road with oncoming traffic, it would be unloving to not stop them from the oncoming danger. A clear example of God's divine discipline for those He loves is in the story of the Israelites.

In Deuteronomy 8, the passage which we heard read to us earlier tonight, here God often describes His children, the people of Israel, and Himself as the father over this nation.

They often went through periods of rebuke and chastisement. They received discipline from their father. But it was always because of His love for them. God is a good father over His people.

[7 : 54] That is who He is. And even some of the hardest moments in Israel's history, such as the exile to Babylon, the destruction of the temple, can be seen as God's discipline for His son.

But through it all, God's love was there for His people. And just in the same way, I'm sure that many of us here have gone through some serious times of testing, or are currently going through times of testing.

That challenge of our faith. Some of us might be going through work pressures, unemployment, sickness, and pain, or maybe just the general wear and tear of living the Christian life.

Then, be encouraged by this reminder. God disciplines those He loves. If you are a child of God, He is disciplining you because of His love for you.

And His discipline is the sign that He loves you. We really, truly have to hold to this. Hold to this dear and close to our hearts.

[8 : 57] Many of us will struggle with the idea that when we are going through times of discipline, that God still loves us. That He is even still there. Our response should be in verses 7 and 8, which is strong and clear.

We are to endure hardship as discipline, because God is treating you as His children. Friends, do you really believe this? Do you have the faith to accept your discipline, your hardships you face this very moment from God Himself?

God loves us. In fact, hardships are actually a sign of God's love for us. He is disciplining us because He is treating us as His children.

Just as we are to submit to and respect our earthly fathers, how much more are we called to submit ourselves to our heavenly Father and live? Have a look now at verses 10-14 and point 2 on your outlines.

The author now gives us the big reason why we must endure hardship as discipline. It is this end outcome of our discipline that motivates us through the difficult periods.

[10 : 14] Ultimately, God disciplines us to make us holy, to make us like Him, and as a result allow us to fellowship with Him. It is the end outcome of any discipline and training that makes it all worthwhile, isn't it?

It's very basic for humans to be motivated by rewards. The clearer we can understand how amazing the final outcome of our training, the more we will be motivated to endure the process of training.

For example, have you here ever flown on a long-distance flight? For example, from Melbourne to LA. My girlfriend Lois recently did.

It's a really long flight, but you can endure it because you know that there is an end goal. And whether that is to go to explore a new country on a holiday, or you're coming home to return to see friends and family.

In the same way, we are shown what our end goal of our discipline is. Have a look at verses 10 to 11. Our discipline ultimately will reap real rewards for us, but only if we are trained by it.

[11 : 28] The author argues that even as our earthly parents disciplined us for a little while, as they thought best, God disciplines us for our good in order that we may share in His holiness.

Unlike an earthly father who may discipline you, maybe for a period of childhood up until your teenage years, who may give you all you need to get through this life, God's discipline and its rewards extend far beyond this physical life.

The contrast is between our earthly father and our heavenly father. This contrast is important. We know, don't we, that our earthly fathers aren't perfect.

In fact, many of us here would even have fathers that have neglected us, or failed to discipline us. And because they are human, they fail in many ways.

Our heavenly father is not like that, however. He is infinitely better. He trains us in a different way. He trains us for the purpose of holiness. Have a look at verses 10 and 11 too.

[12 : 36] Holiness and righteousness. These are often not rewards that we associate with training and discipline. But the word shows us that these rewards, out of our discipline, are far greater than any human discipline can provide.

The reason is that these rewards reflect God's character, ultimately enabling us to draw nearer to Him in fellowship. God is holy.

So sharing in His holiness basically means to be like God. Just let the thought of that sink in for a bit. The end outcome is to be like God.

Take a moment and let that sink in. How unbelievable and awesome that is. The Bible teaches us that humans are made in the image of God, and that we are created to be from the very beginning, to share in His likeness, to reflect His glory.

We are to be like God in His holiness, because God is holy. And this is our reward. And the way we were created to be, despite everything that tempts us, holiness is actually what is best for us.

[13 : 46] But is this great reward for you? Or should I say, is this reward great for you? Is it enough for you to choose a life of endurance, even as we receive God's discipline for us in our lives?

You see, our end goal, the real purpose of our training is this. As we are growing in holiness, we can see God truly encounter Him and fellowship with Him.

We can see that explained a bit better later in verse 14. And as we are being trained in our holiness, eventually we will be able to reap this harvest of peace and righteousness.

Some translations have more literally, peaceable fruit or peaceful fruit. We don't know exactly when this harvest is born, but we can say that it's here in the age to come.

The fruit is born after a period of resisting, enduring, toiling in holiness. Every small victory of resisting sin, every season of enduring hardship will eventually pay off if we persevere.

[14 : 56] We can see small results, small growth areas, small gains over time. Whether you have been a Christian for a year or 50, we all can see God working through us to bear these peaceable fruits of righteousness, sometimes very slowly.

It might be in small areas, such as how you speak to your colleagues. It may be how we think about our finances, or how we use the internet even.

God knows exactly in your heart the area that you need to grow in holiness. Therefore, He provides you with opportunities to be trained in holiness in these specific areas.

It's a bit like going to the gym and building muscle through resistance. This fruit comes only after a period of sowing, a period of resisting and enduring.

No discipline seems pleasant at that time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

[16 : 04] Just as Jesus received the greatest reward for His obedience as the Son, we too continue to persevere will receive a great reward.

We too who are called His children have the opportunity to receive this reward only if we continue to endure and persevere in faith. Just as a challenge for you and me here tonight, this end goal, this ultimate outcome of our training is this.

One day we will meet God face to face. We will all meet God face to face. The question is, how will your holiness be before Him on that day? The author gives us some practical instructions on how to reap these peaceable fruits.

Have a look with me at verses 12 to 13. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

This isn't just an encouragement to go to your nearest gym and do some chin-ups or squats. The author is actually alluding back to the original imagery in chapter 12, continuing to run a race with perseverance, the race marked out before us.

[17 : 19] He leaves us with a final warning on how to respond to the issue of discipline and sin. He's like a coach on the sidelines yelling to the athlete who may be weary, perhaps even thinking of throwing in the towel and giving up, get back to the race, do not give up.

Specifically here, we can see that we are called to persevere in our faith, to strive for greater blessings by pursuing two things, peace and holiness.

And we are to do this by making every effort to live in peace with everyone. This is what the author seems to be encouraging the audience to do.

So those of you who take notes, what about taking some time to think about what areas in your life right now you can continue to practice pursuing holiness and peace, both in our church communities, but also where we are called to spend most of our working week, whether that's in university, home, at work.

You see, the church is our training ground, a gym for us to practice our holiness and peace. We are commanded to make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy.

[18 : 36] For without holiness, no one will be able to see the Lord. Once again, we are reminded of the priority and the end outcome of holiness. The reward of holiness is that we can encounter God.

Finally, the author finishes in section, in the last section of 15 to 17, with a final warning. This is point 3 on your outline. This is a serious warning and is not to be taken lightly.

The reason it is severe is because of the lasting eternal consequences. We're first warned against what we shouldn't do. Then we're given the tragic example in the story of Esau.

Have a look with me at verse 15. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows to cause trouble and defile many.

You see, the warning in verse 15 is for those who insisted, sorry, instead of reaping a harvest of righteousness from enduring God's discipline, are a group of people who will reap a bitter root.

[19 : 44] These are those who have missed or fallen short of the grace of God, failing to endure discipline as hardship, rather hardening their hearts to His promises.

We are commanded to make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God and to prevent the bitter root that will grow up, cause trouble, and defile many. Suffering is a very deep and personal subject.

It involves a lot of pain which often goes unspoken. Can I take this time again to encourage you, if this is you, to talk to someone after the service?

This is why we have groups such as the prayer group up at the front. Talk to someone you trust and share what is on your heart. It is how we respond to the sufferings that makes all the difference.

We can either continue to persevere in faith, trusting in God's promises, in spite of our present sufferings, or we can receive His sufferings as hardship and grow weary, harden our hearts, eventually give up on the promises altogether.

[20 : 55] We are to be careful of this bitter root. We are warned of the potential danger and damage it does to oneself and others as it grows up.

Finally, the author leaves us with the tragic story of Esau, which is described along with the sin of sexual immorality. Here we are shown the ultimate warning which has been repeated throughout Hebrews, a condition of the hardened heart which has been caused by unbelief.

You see, this is the underlying condition of those who have come to have a bitter root. Esau, and the condition of sexual immorality and godlessness is there as an example of God's, of neglecting God's eternal promises, exchanging His eternal promises for the world's temporal pleasures.

In this final warning, we are reminded of the many recurring messages throughout Hebrews that if we continue in unbelief, we can fall away.

When we continue to have a heart that is divided and not fixed on our eternal destiny but the things of this life, we see Esau as a case in point, a truly tragic story.

[22 : 13] You see, the underlying issue with Esau is that he forfeited what was of eternal worth, his birthright, and his inheritance from God for something temporal and cheap.

We're told that he despised his birthright and traded it for something that had eternal worth for something that did not. He did not understand the worth of trusting God's promises to endure hardship and to persevere in faith.

Just as with sexual temptation and worldliness, it's a great temptation because it promises to meet our immediate needs now, but in the end it does not satisfy our long-term, eternal appetite.

No doubt Esau was extremely hungry. We can remember from the story that he had just been out hunting, but he did not make a good decision in that moment.

In that moment, you see, he forfeited his birthright and made a decision that cost him greatly. As we can remember from the account in Genesis 26 that even when he wanted to obtain the blessing, he was unable to.

[23 : 20] The decision was final. He could not change what had happened, something that cost him an ultimate regret. We can see there it says afterwards when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected.

Even though he saw the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done. We know from the Genesis account, and we don't have time to go into detail here, but I would encourage you to follow this up.

Maybe someone like Mark. The idea here is that Esau, even though he had regret on the surface, didn't show true repentance in his behavior. He fell short or he missed the grace of God.

He despised his birthright. He did not truly repent and seek to live under the child of promise, which was Jacob. We, however, have a chance, don't we?

Because God's grace is shown in Jesus, and we are told to receive this grace of God, we must remember how serious this warning is, not even to think that this can't be us, because we can easily look at this example of Esau and think how awful, how tragic this life was.

[24 : 33] You see, my brothers and sisters, as tragic as the story of Esau is, he missed out on the promise of the blessing. How much more severe would it be for us who have been given this example to fail to hear the message of warning that we begin to trade what is eternal for something that is temporal?

Can you not see the author's point here? The word of God, like a double-edged sword, pierces right to the heart, and that this is us if we're not careful. Our very temptation when we continue to drift away and neglect to accept God's discipline as a means of his love is that we too eventually can fail to persevere in our faith.

We too can have a hardened heart of unbelief and we too can eventually drift away. And even as Esau had a chance to come back to God, God who is gracious, we who have a Jesus, a great high priest, a perfecter and founder of our faith, we can look to him, repent, and get back into the race.

Please pray with me. Heavenly Father, thank you for Jesus as our great high priest. May we fix our eyes on him and continue to throw off things that entangle us.

Help us by the power of the Holy Spirit to live a life that is pleasing to you and to eventually share in your holiness through your Son's almighty and precious name.

[26 : 09] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. ...

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