

By Faith – Understanding God’s Discipline

Hello King of Kings Church family – and welcome to everyone joining us online! If you are new – you are welcome too! ... it is great to have you joining us, whoever you are... wherever you are – and whatever the time zone is!

We are a church family who love God, we love people, and we love being a part of God’s mission in the world – making disciples.

Today I wanted to take some time to talk to you about **“Understanding God’s Discipline”** in our lives. Now right there... some of you might be feeling, *“Whoah! That’s it, I’m out! I don’t want to hear about God’s discipline!”*

I don’t blame you! But I really want to encourage you to hear me out... even more than that though – to hear the Word of the Lord – and the Spirit of God speaking to you today. Because you will find that he is a God who loves you – and wants the best for you.

So let’s talk about “Understanding God’s Discipline.”

I know when the word “discipline” is used – there is often some kind of a reaction! Because like me, you can probably think of a time... or times... when you messed up as a kid, and got into big trouble with your parents? Right?

I know at one stage, I got real good at running away from my parents! I would climb a tree... and just stay up there! I knew if I came down... I was going to get some “discipline!”

I quickly learnt - The problem was... the longer I stayed up there... the worse the discipline usually got when I eventually came down 😊

From my days at my family home, to my days at a very traditional school boarding house – discipline meant all kinds of things to me. Some good. Some bad.

Whatever the word conjures up for you... For most of us... the word discipline is usually synonymous with the word “punishment”... but the truth is... discipline is so much more than just that. Discipline can also be a really good thing!

Healthy discipline is a part of training and growing as a person.

It takes discipline to become truly great at something. I have my Grandmother’s antique violin in my study... and it reminds me... that it takes discipline to master something.

When Pablo Casals, a master cellist... was 95 years old... he was asked why he continued to practice 6 hours a day... at the age of 95! He answered, *“Because I think I’m making progress.”* That’s discipline.

Discipline helps us grow and develop, yet it is something we often avoid and resist ... because it is uncomfortable.

It is this resistance to discipline... and trying to wriggle out of uncomfortable things... that many of us bring into our relationship with God.

So as we look at what it means to live by faith – we have to learn to receive the loving discipline of our heavenly father. Listen to what it says in our passage today, starting in Hebrews 12 verse 4...

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. (Hebrews 12:4)

That's not a very nice way to start to this passage! Right!?

But we all struggle with sin issues in our lives – It is important to be honest about that.

And this is really the first step in understanding the discipline and correction of God in our lives. If we want to grow in faith, if we want to mature, we have to...

1. REMEMBER TO TAKE SIN SERIOUSLY (vs 4)

God's word reminds us today here in vs 4; that there is a... **"struggle against sin."** It's important we recognize that.

Furthermore – it's personal. It's **"your struggle against sin."**

During this pandemic. We have seen the highs and lows of people. We have seen the best of people come out, and we have seen the worst of people come out.

There have been times I have blown it. I'm sure you've made your fair share of mistakes as well!

We are all in a struggle against our own sinfulness. Praise God for Jesus, and the forgiveness he offers by grace, and his goodness in caring about rescuing us from sin, and helping us to find victory over it.

One writer by the name of Randy Alcorn said this;

A good God, concerned for our welfare, must no more ignore our sin problem than a good physician would ignore a patient's disease. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23, CSB).—Randy Alcorn

Sin kills. But Jesus saves.

Up to this point in the book of Hebrews... God has been teaching us about faith - and that true faith is both an exciting and risky adventure – like a mountaintop... and at other times, it is hard, like a deep hard valley.

The metaphor has also been there of an athlete – running a difficult race – that requires perseverance. And it seems like some of the Christians who were alive at the time of this letter - were in danger of dropping out of the Christian race, and giving up on their faith. In their struggle against sin – they were considering just giving up.

So as we learnt from Pastor Ian last week, they are being challenged to consider Jesus, who encountered so much bitter and relentless opposition in his life and ministry.

And now, they are being reminded, that even though what they are experiencing is difficult and unpleasant – they have not yet been required to pay for their faith by the surrender of their lives. The author is saying – this isn't tough, it could get worse!

This walk with Jesus... was never guaranteed to be a soft and cushy life.

So the Word of God now starts to challenge them... and us...

Are we resisting sin... or are we just accepting it? Are we giving-up and giving-in. Or are we being transformed to become more like Jesus? Are we persevering? Are we accepting the correction and discipline of God - to grow us in holiness and purity - or is it too hard to change, too uncomfortable?

AW Tozer said;

"Complacency is easy... and it is a deadly foe of spiritual growth." —AW Tozer

As you wrestle with sin – don't play games my friends. We must remember to take sin seriously; secondly; we also need to...

2. REMEMBER GOD'S WORD (vs 5)

Look with me at verse 5 & 6;

And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." (Heb 12:5-6)

This passage is written to people going through a tough time – because often, when we hit hard times... we forget all the truths we know about God. We forget the word of God. So I want to ask you today...

"Have you completely forgotten... his word?"

Friends, not everyone who hears or reads God's word gives their full attention to it. Are you still giving your full attention to this word of encouragement!

Hebrews goes on to quote a familiar passage from Proverbs;

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens (or chastises) everyone he accepts as his son."

In tough times - Too often we start feeling sorry for ourselves and equate our tough times as a lack of God's love or presence. "Oh poor me! Where is God when I need him!"

It is so easy when we are hurting, to fall into pity, and to focus on ourselves, rather than on God's bigger picture. Yet God says, he disciplines us, because he loves us.

In this passage, we see there are **3 reactions to the Lord's discipline** in our lives;

1. **Some people are indifferent to it** – they take it “*too lightly.*”
2. **Some people are overwhelmed by it** – they “*lose heart.*” They lose courage. Life just gets them down, and they feel the Lord has abandoned them. And then... there are..
3. **Some people who rejoice in it** – Now why would they do that? Because they know; “*The Lord disciplines those who he loves.*” Friends, adversity should not drive us to despair. Only those who are truly loved are tested. Jesus told his disciples they should expect nothing less. The Lord's discipline in my life, confirms that I am his child.

So as you respond to God's word in your lives – remember what it teaches us. When God disciplines us, it is because he loves us. Don't take it lightly, don't be overwhelmed by it, just say; “*Thank you Lord. Get me through this Lord. Teach me Lord.*”

Here's the next thing I want you to understand when it comes to the Lords discipline in our lives...

3. REMEMBER THE FATHER'S HEART (vs 6)

I don't know about you... but it helps me to face correction – when I know it is coming from someone who loves me. I don't receive correction well if I know the person giving it could care less about me. But I always listen up when it's someone I know loves me.

The word for “discipline” here, is the word “*paideia.*” It is mostly used to describe “raising a child.” It almost reminds me of a young “*padawan*” in Star Wars! A young warrior being trained by a master. PS: Lots of dodgy new age stuff in Star Wars! Be discerning!

The point I am making, is this word “*paideia*” conveys a meaning of rearing, training, instruction, correction... Not just punishment. God does not discipline us just to punish... but rather to shape us... and to grow us... to make us stronger.

So it is very important to acknowledge the Father's heart in discipline.

The same word, “*paideia*” is used in Eph 6;

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up (*paideia* them) **in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Eph 6.4)**

Same word. Also... Timothy...

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for (padeia) teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16)

So when it comes to receiving the Lords discipline and correction in our lives – We must remember the Father’s heart!

Now I realise here that I am talking to people with many different experiences of what a father is like. Some have had fantastic fathers; others abusive fathers; others absent fathers. That can shape and shadow how we feel about God as our Heavenly Father.

But remember, God is our perfect Father – the one who never messes up. He is the one who loves you perfectly – He is your creator. He is holy, He is just, He is forgiving, He is merciful. Let Him shape your view of Fatherhood and men, let Him be your role model Father. As a father myself – I realize how far I fall short in how to train and discipline my kids. One commentator put it like this;

(a) Our heavenly Father knows each of us thoroughly and perfectly, including all of our thoughts and motives. He deals with us in perfect wisdom. While good fathers always try to act in love, they often fail. But God always acts in love, seeking our highest good.

Earthly fathers can be mean or angry, but God is never temperamental. Earthly fathers have jurisdiction over us during childhood. But God’s authority and discipline extends over our lifetimes. Good earthly fathers seek to prepare us for life on earth. But God is preparing us for eternity.

So, here is the next point...

4. REMEMBER GOD’S CARE FOR YOU (vs 7)

Verse 7 says this;

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! (Heb 12:7-9)

I love how God uses this passage, to reveal his care for us, and that he wants us to trust him – and part of that trust – means submitting to him.

Like ‘discipline’, the word ‘submit’ grates many people as well. There are so many people who have a problem with authority figures and having to submit. It’s like the theme song of some people – Question authority! Never submit!

The problem comes in... when it comes to your relationship with God – who is the ultimate authority! And whether you like his program for your life or not, it is a terrible idea to rebel against it. As vs 9 tells us; *if we submit to the Father of our spirits, we will live!*

One commentator put it like this;

(b) "True life... comes from complete self-surrender to God"

Now why would we want to do that? Because my friends, submitting to the Father's discipline, is an essential part of a father-son, or father-daughter relationship.

True believers, submit themselves to the Father's discipline, they don't run away and climb trees to get away from it! Because they know that discipline is a mark of genuine sonship – and daughterhood.

I see it like this, I have never disciplined other people's disobedient children, but I have disciplined my own children – I do that because I love them, and I want them to grow up to respect healthy and proper authority. I discipline my own kids. God does the same.

The bible says, that if you lack discipline, you are not a true child of God – but rather, you are illegitimate. Illegitimate children have no discipline, and they have no inheritance. But legitimate children of God – they are heirs, heirs to the promise of eternal life,

So make sure that you are a genuine child of God through faith in Christ! If you are His child, then trials and discipline are an evidence of His love, not of His neglect!

So how are you responding to the hard times that you are facing at the moment – Do you trust in God's bigger picture, and the lessons you can learn, or are you resisting him?

Let's trust in God's care for us and **submit to the Father ... and live!**

Remember that he cares for us – and he has a purpose! That's the next point...

5. REMEMBER GOD'S PURPOSE (vs 10-11)

Vs 10 says of early fathers...

¹⁰ They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:10-11)

I am so glad that God stuck this in here! Discipline seems – in our limited perspective, to be terrible!

The key is, in the midst of the trials and the tears, to focus on the goal, the purpose, the fruit of righteousness and peace. If we keep in mind what God is doing in light of eternity, then we can endure with inner joy and peace, while at the same time admitting the struggle.

Remember to take sin seriously

Remember God's Word

Remember the Father's heart...

Remember God's care for you

Remember God's purpose, finally today;

6. REMEMBER TO DIG DEEP WITH JESUS & STAY ON TRACK (vs 12-13)

I love how this passage ends; vs 12;

¹² Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ¹³ "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

As we close – the passage ends here by coming back to the idea of physical training – and the race we are all in.

Some believers had come to a point in their race when they were feeling weak. When their arms were hanging at their sides. Exhaustion had set in. Sin had set in. They had gone off track – off the path God had laid out before them.

The author ends by saying – it's time to dig deep! It's time to strengthen those feeble arms and weak knees. Come on! Dig deep with Jesus and find your strength in Him!

Don't go off path. That's where injuries happen. Stay on track. In modern terms, this verse is something like physio —sport-like training meant to strengthen a weakened body part. By keeping to the correct path, spiritually, the parts of us which are weak, can be healed and strengthened.

So dig deep in Jesus - and stay on course! Let the master physio train you and make you strong. Yes, discipline from God is not fun, it is not easy, but it is necessary if we are to grow and become like him.

CONCLUSION

So my friend; How do you respond to the Lord's discipline in your life?

- Do you resist, resent and rebel against God?
- Do you submit grudgingly?
- Or do you acknowledge God's goodness in shaping you and loving you enough to discipline you?

Jeremiah's prayed this: **LORD, I know that people's lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps. ²⁴ Discipline me, LORD, but only in due measure— not in your anger, or you will reduce me to nothing. (Jeremiah 10:23)**

How will you respond this week to your circumstances? Would you take the time to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what God is teaching you through this? Will you submit your life to God?

Let's pray together...

Notes:

(a) Steven J Cole. (Bible.org.)

(b) Bishop Westcott (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans], p. 402)