



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 11th August 2019

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Scripture: Hebrews 12: 5-13

Subject: Part 41 – Disciplined Runners

⁵And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; ⁶For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.” ⁷If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. ⁹Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it ¹²Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, ¹³and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

Some, as we have seen, were tremendously weakened on account of fear. They were tempted to turn back and tried to walk down a fork road, but no one has ever done that successfully. The end of chapter 11 is clear that suffering for the Lord was nothing new hence the exhortation in chapter 12 verses 1 to 4. The encouragement was to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus because He, more than any other, had suffered far more than anyone else. We also saw that the Christian life is described as a race and each one of us must run our own course set before us with Jesus as our role model. Like all athletes, discipline and staying on the right course is very important to successfully finish well, and now in these verses we see that the author now focuses on the importance of divine discipline, chastening and correction. Should

it surprise us that God our father will discipline us? For some of us, this is initially going to be uncomfortable, why? Because we look at these verses through the eyes of our life's experience, and how we've experienced discipline. Some of you may read chastening of the Lord and the first thing your mind goes back to is an abusive situation or unfair discipline. So you may think, well I'm too old for that, but you need to be very careful because God has placed us under divine authority. But as we see these verses set out before us, we are reminded of God's love – in verse 5, The reason in verse 6, The reaction in verse 7, the reward if we submitted in verse 11 and renewal that God will allow in verse 13.

THE REASON

Verses 5 and 6 are a quotation from Proverbs 3 verses 11 and 12. It centres on our relationship with the Lord, as our Father who has a special interest in us not just finishing the race but running the course well. God loves us so much that He wants to bring you onto maturity in Him. He wants spiritual strong men and women to serve Him, not just babies. In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul wrote to the Corinthians saying I wish I could speak to you as mature people but some of you are acting immaturely; So I'm going to speak to you like Spiritual children. He went on to say to the Ephesians in Chapter 4 verses 14 and 15:

that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ

When you are young you don't always understand trials and difficulties but when you get older you begin to realise that it helps you to grow. Discipline is used in the growing process. If you want an abundant fruit tree, you need to prune it, you need to train it so that when the time is right, it will produce abundant fruit. For a child, discipline not only brings peace in the home, it also enables them to mature in the right way, establishes healthy boundaries, it gives them confidence and security in their lives. It's unloving not to discipline, even irresponsible for a parent to not discipline their child. This is the same for God. If anything characterises modern Christianity, it is the absence of Spiritual discipline or spiritual exercise. Yet such disciplines forms the core of the life of devotion. It's not an exaggeration to state that this is the lost dimension in modern Christianity.

The key word in these verses is the word “discipline”. It is used nine times in these nine verses and it comes from the Greek word “paideia” which in turn comes from “pais” meaning child. The word is a broad term signifying whatever parents and teachers do, to train, correct, cultivate, and educate children, in order to help them develop and mature as they ought. Remember what discipline is; it is correction that is to result in wholeness and wellness. The goal of discipline is correction and restoration. Discipline occurs in order to effect a change in behaviour. Punishment, on the other hand, is the consequence for bad behaviour. God can punish wrong doing, remember that verse, what a person sows, so will he reap? If you are committed to breaking the law, it may catch up with you. As believers we often have to suffer painful consequences for our sins, but you will never have to suffer God’s judgment for sin as a believer. The punishment for all of our sins, Christ took completely on Himself in the crucifixion. He paid our debt that we could not pay and gave to us what we did not deserve, as Colossians 2:13-14 says:

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, ¹⁴having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

The God of the Bible does not want double payment for any sin. Yes we deserve God’s wrathful punishment because of our sin, yet, we will not face it on account that Jesus took what was and is ours, and bore the punishment for us. God’s Love or His justice would not require payment for what His Son has paid for in full. But Discipline is for the purpose of correction. It is to put us on the right track, back on the right course.

Think of discipline as a course of correction. You might become discouraged with the process of discipline, even become annoyed by it or despise it, but Andrew Murray wrote –

“God has no pleasure in afflicting us, but will not keep back even the most painful chastisement if He can but thereby guide His beloved child to come home and abide in the beloved Son”.

God doesn’t deal with His children as criminals, condemning you or hating you. The bible is very clear – Romans 8 verse 1: *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*

God doesn't condemn the Christian, however, don't jump to the conclusion that God is always happy with what you do or doesn't care if you sin. While He doesn't condemn us neither does He condone us. Real grace isn't a licence to carry on in sin and do whatever we like. Does it matter to God how His children behave? How they conduct themselves? Is He really a caring Father? God loves us too much to allow us to continue in our sin because sin destroys us, it can ruin our lives and so, He will correct us. You may have a goal in your life. Maybe change something, or do something differently. That may be your goal, but God may have a different plan for you because God's goal for your life is to make you more like Jesus. He is in the process of making you more like Him, in character and conduct. He has all the resources, knowledge and nothing is hidden from Him. Whether you are conscious of it or not, that's what God is doing for you.

Surely this shows us very clearly that God is active, God is the instigator. It shows us that God's dealings with us is not an after-thought, like when we do something then it's time for Him to move into our situation. No, it has being from the beginning of your pain, even before, that God has your correction designed with your benefit and His glory in mind.

Someone once said that *'God is not an A&E doctor who stitches you up after you have had a freak accident but He is a wise and loving and skilful surgeon who plans the incision in your body to remove the cancer'*

You see the A&E doctor can only repair a misfortune, an accident. But the Surgeon, from the beginning, while he may plan to inflict pain with the incision, He is very intentional in service to you, in helping you and in blessing you. Our God disciplines us like this.

If you are going through pain, whatever that may be, you can often think it is the devil and pray to God to move in your life, and come into the situation. But that's the wrong prayer really, because the fact is, God is already there. You are treating God like the A&E doctor, trying to fix the mistake, the circumstance. But God is Sovereign, wise and a loving father who is always working out all things together for your good. This is our God. Active, Sovereign and working in your life. In times of pain it is very easily to forget this, so you will need to let this really sink in, right now. Remember what the Lord is saying here in Verse 5 and 6 – **And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."**

So what are the reasons for discipline? Here in these verses we see that firstly it proves his love for us and secondly it proves that we are His children. He chastens those He loves and scourges every son He acknowledges. Unlike a lot of people, God is not pernicious. You know, when you are getting disciplined you can think *what have I done wrong, why does God hate me, why is he angry with me?* We don't always see the wrong we've done or the need for correction. But the reason that He disciplines his children isn't because He hates us, it's because He loves you. We all want God's love but we don't want his discipline, but the irony is this. God's discipline serves as one of the proofs of God's love. So when someone says to you, *how do you know God's love?* Well you have the cross of course but also the other is that He is willing to discipline you and give you guidance and instruction and direction. Satan knows how to twist that, doesn't he.

CH Spurgeon wrote - *“When God chastises His children, he does not punish as a judge does, but chastens as a father.”*

Verse 8 tells us - **But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.**

The word illegitimate in the Greek is the word – Nothos, which means not just when a child's parents are not married but when the father doesn't acknowledge or support His child as His own. Some people think that God doesn't really care about them, never mind their sin, their disobedience, when they are falling back in their race, their rebellious hearts, their painful prideful hearts. They think God is unconcerned with their wickedness even their immaturity. But this passage shows the exact opposite, because you are His child, He completely is interested in your conduct, in your development and discipline brings assurance.

Are you being taught or disciplined? Are you being taught by the Holy Spirit? These things prove that God, the Father, is our Father in Heaven. He is not only deeply concern about your circumstance or that you finish the race well but also about how you run your race, are you becoming more like Jesus?

THE REACTION

Our response or our reaction to this discipline is vital. Discipline and the scourging of the Lord can be a painful and an uncomfortable process.

Corrie Ten Boom wrote – *“It hurts when God has to pry things out of our hands.”*

God has to often do that, *doesn't He?* And it can really hurt, *can't it?* But we need to be mindful of how we react to what He is doing in our lives. There are really three things that we are being warned of in these verses – Don't despise it, don't regard God's discipline lightly and thirdly, Don't become weary or don't become discouraged.

If you resist discipline you are resisting God's Plan and purpose for your life.. You may have a wounded spirit, you may be feeling hurt. When you feel hurt it can be sometimes followed by bitterness especially if you think that it is God who has hurt you. You can become bitter, even live a life estranged from Him, distracted, overwhelmed by stubbornness, rebellion even anger. So how do you change your feelings? You need to acknowledge God's sovereignty and that He knows best. Then you need to allow God to take over your life, even over your feelings which are the root cause of your reactions. Often we are disciplined if we demonstrate signs of immaturity, even of foolishness, rebellion, being right in our own eyes, being arrogant and careless, having worldly and carnal focus, quick to anger, lack the fruits of the Holy Spirit, lacking judgement, this is just some of the reasons why a believer invites discipline, guidance, structure.

Are you experiencing this? Don't despise it, don't resist it. It's for your own good, for your testimony and for God's glory that He wants you to become more like Jesus. Maybe discipline begins with a tug at your conscious or heart, that small voice saying don't do that.. it's not good, it's not helpful, maybe you open your bible and God speaks to you, but maybe it's through circumstances. We are informed we have missed the marker, or to use the race analogy, we have gone of course a bit. We hear the Spirit say in our minds and hearts, "You have done wrong, you need to put that right". We might respond with something like, "No I was right" or worst "I don't care." Your troubled, if your conscious is sensitive, and God will trouble you, you will have no peace, you're out of sorts and you know why. There is no peace and the feeling that your fellowship is broken, pains. So you need repent and you put it right and that's it.

Don't take this discipline lightly, meaning you can through the pain but you don't take it to heart, you don't reflect upon your life, you don't examine your soul. You allow yourself to go through the suffering without saying to the Lord "*What is it that you are correcting me for?*"

Or What do you want to teach me Lord?" I'm not saying that everything bad that happens is just God trying to teach you something or that you must have done something wrong, but it does mean that every time you face pain or a trial or suffering, it's a wonderful opportunity to stand back and examine yourself. It's the right and responsible thing to do. It's part of the course and maturing as a believer. So don't regard it lightly.

Don't become weary or discourage, don't despair when you are being disciplined. It's very easy to do, but don't forget the exhortation as verse 5 begins. You must remember, through the process, God is your Father, He loves you and is doing this for your own good. Just like a parent who disciplines their child in a loving way, afterwards they embrace. The parent doesn't stop loving the child when they are disciplining them, they are disciplining them because they love the child. So too our Father God. As Romans 8 verses 38 and 39 tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God, that includes the reasons why God needs to discipline us. Let me remind you, that when a parent corrects their child, even for something very serious, ideally, they don't put them out of the family. God most defiantly does not do that when He disciplines His children. I repeat, He is drawing them closer and deeper into fellowship of His family. Psalm verses 33-34 tells us:

Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, Nor allow My faithfulness to fail.

THE REWARD

If there are no boundaries given, no consequences to our actions then that would be a real recipe for imprisonment because in the real world that doesn't work, does it? Do you think that our Heavenly Father allows his children live in unrepentant rebellion forever? If so then, that is a misunderstanding of a just, merciful, and loving Holy Father. How could it possibly be a version of a loving God, who would leave you up to your own devices? Does it surprise you that a patient God – will deal with His children in such a profound way?

God never says wrong things without all the information – God knows all things. Parents aren't always consistent. But God is. For the Christian, we have to make a choice, is it a self-centre life or a Christ-centre life? We may get it wrong. But God always discipline us for our good and for us to be partakers in His holiness.

William MacDonald wrote – ***“But God’s discipline is always perfect. His love is infinite and His wisdom is infallible. His chastening are never the result of whim, but always for our profit. His objective is that we may be partakers of His Holiness. And godliness can never be produced outside of God’s school.”***

Godliness doesn’t happen by just going to church or reading your bible or having Christian friends, doing Christian things. All these are wonderful and great in and off themselves but godliness and Holiness can only come when God moves in our lives dealing with the areas in our lives that requires a radical change and only By Him. We also come out of those times with peace and righteousness. Holiness isn’t produced by selfishness or immaturity. This is the goal that the Lord has in mind for you, to make you Holy and beautiful like Jesus. Sometimes the best tool God has to spiral you to Himself is pain, so he disciplines us in this way.

Joy wrote – ***“The fire which is kindled isn’t a bomb fire which is blazing, unguarded, consuming precious things. Its refiner’s fire and the refiner sits by it and he is firmly and patiently and gently bringing holiness out of carelessness and stability out of weakness”***

This is very like what William Bate wrote –

The Devil usually tempts men into a paradise of delights, to precipitate them into hell; God tries them in the furnace of afflictions to purify and prepare them for heaven.”

It is not a feel good factor, it’s difficult, no-one enjoys it, no-one asks for it, but God isn’t concerned with your comfort, He is concerned that you become more like Jesus.

The pressure to repent and change can be overwhelming. *Have you ever been kept awake at night by the Holy Spirit, to get things right, to do thing, when all you really want is to get asleep?* Your conscience tells you of the things you have got to change, you may want to get to sleep but God has a bigger prize because discipline produces peace and righteousness. Once repentance comes and things are put in order, you don’t just get to go back to your life as normal, *no*, you are rewarded by peace and righteousness.

Charles Spurgeon wrote –

“I am afraid that all the grace I have got out of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might all lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows and pains and griefs is altogether incalculable. What do I not owe to the hammer and anvil, the fire and file? Affliction is the best furniture in my house.”

It is very hard for us to see the good in God’s chastening us as it is for a child to see the good in a parent chastening them. God’s discipline may hurt us but not harm us. No one is disciplined for no reason but for a good reason. God may take from us the very thing we want, like the position that make us prominent and proud, even peace and security so that we are thrown back on Him. God has so much to give us, and He wants us to run the best race we can, so that we can encourage others also and be a blessing, testifying of His goodness too us along the way.

Warren Wiersbe wrote - *“God’s chastening is meant to help us grow, not to beat us down. The correct attitude is that we endure by faith, allowing God to work out His perfect plan. It is the blessed ‘afterwards’ of verse 11 that keeps us going”*

But it can be a tough part of the track, which is why when we come to verse 12 we see –

Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,

Another way we could read verse 12 is - Take a new grip with your tried hands, stand firm on your shaky legs. Lift up these hands in praise and in service of others. For the task – our knees may lack strength but God will strengthen them through our knees being bent in prayer.

Then we come to verse 13 -

¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

Because of Pain, discomfort, discouragement even fear we can react in many ways. For example, if you disobeyed or dishonoured God, maybe you may have got hurt in the process, things didn’t go well, don’t let that keep you away from God, in fact it says make straight paths for your feet, come back, even if you feel like your life is all over the place, its disconnected

from God and life is not where you should be, repent, go under the discipline of God and be made whole again, be healed.

J.H. Lange gave this marvellous illustration:

A weary traveller, tired of the road and the buffering of the tempest stands dispirited and limp, with shoulders bowed, with hands hanging slack, with knees bent and shaking, ready to give up and sink into the ground. Such can God's pilgrims become as pictured by our writer but one comes to him, confident of men with kindly smile and firm voice and says "Cheer up, stand erect, brace your limbs, take heart and grace, you've come already this far, throw not away former toils, a noble home is at the end of your journey. See yonder is the finest road to it, keep straight, seek the great physician's healing for your lameness. Your forerunner came by the same hard road to the palace of God. Others have gone before you and won through. Others are on their way. You are not alone. Press on you can reach the goal, you can reach the prize."

Hold your head up, hold your hands up, stand straight, look at the signs and marks for heaven, look at the people who've walk before you, remember there are people behind you. Remember what was said last week, Look back, Look up and Look forward. Chastening is for our profit that we might be sharers of His Holiness, and our submission brings the most glory to Him name. The path can be painful and difficult and we can be tempted to give up but it's not the right time.

If you are going through pain or discipline you may not make sense of it right now, but when you are down the road you will be able to look back and see God's wisdom, patience and gentleness towards you. You will be able to thank Him for these times, because it is these times that you will be able to see how they have helped you to grow in grace, love and maturity. We have to trust Him throughout the whole process, knowing that He is Sovereign and Has our interest at His heart. We need to live by faith, following Him, trusting Him.

The Lord knows your sufferings. God isn't disassociated from your afflictions, Isaiah 63 verse 9 tells us:

In all their affliction He was afflicted, And the Angel of His Presence saved them; In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; And He bore them and carried them, All the days of old.

Our Father's hand will never cause His child a needless tear.

So what have we learned? Not to despise God's discipline, not to take it lightly, Not to give up, don't become weary or discouraged. We endure discipline because:

- It proves God's love
- It proves God's leadership
- It proves God's relationship
- It proves God's paternity. His paternity become the bases of our maturity.
- God disciplines us to assure us we are His children – v8
- God disciplines us to save us and stir us to truly live – v9
- God disciplines us for our good and to make us partakers of His Holiness v10
- God disciplines us so that we can bear the fruit of peace and righteousness

So what should our response be through these times?

If we feel discouraged or defeated because of trials and difficulties or suffering, we need to lift up our hands and straighten our knees. We need to allow God's discipline and not life's discouragement to define our life. We need to follow the straight paths – What the Word of God says, refrain from what God wants us to refrain from, obey God, follow what the Holy Spirit tells us to do even submit to God's healing

Training in the Greek mean – Gymnasoma – Kind of like Gymnasium – If any of you go to the gym, you will know that it can be painful to build up your muscles, so too can it be, to build up your spiritual muscles, your spiritual life. Build up your spiritual muscles so you can encourage others who are weak, whose lives are dislocated and broken because of rebellion.

Hosea 6v1 –

Come, and let us return to the Lord; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up.

Amen.