

Hebrews 12:4-13
August 28, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Can I see a show of hands of those who experienced corporal punishment or “discipline” as a child? [See a show of hands]

Q: Did any of you ever question your parent’s love for you when you were being disciplined? If yes, how did you resolve that?

Q: Now that your adults, do you appreciate your parent’s discipline? If yes, why? What benefits did you derive from it?

Q: Many of you are parents and have been on the “other side of the fence.” Can you describe how difficult it is to discipline your children for their own good?

Q: What are some intentional things you said or did for your children to assure them of your love for them? Did that happen before the discipline? After the discipline? Both before and after?

What is my personal experience with being disciplined by my father?

Many of you know that my father was a lieutenant commander in the Navy, and he ran our household as a “ship” with strict rules. When we disobeyed, we got spanked. As a young girl, I just remember that I worked hard at pleasing my father and making sure I didn’t do anything wrong. It was more important to be in his favor. I also can’t say for sure that I connected his discipline as an “act of love” while he was doing what was best for me at the time.

It wasn’t until I reached adulthood that I really appreciated Dad’s discipline of me and my brother. With perfect 20/20 hindsight, I can see the benefits of discipline, and I respect him for that. I learned right from wrong. I learned that obedience to authority figures mattered, and if I rebelled, there would be consequences. It was a way to prepare me for the real world. Gene and I turned out all right. ☺

Transition: All of us who were disciplined by our parents will appreciate today’s passage of Scripture. Just as we can look back at our childhoods and appreciate parents who loved us enough to discipline us, **as children of God we CAN appreciate God’s discipline BY remembering the BENEFITS that grow out of it.** As we go through today’s verses, let’s read with an eye toward why God’s discipline benefits us. Let’s begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.4:

- In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

V.5:

- And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

V.6:

- because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

V.7:

- Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?

V.8:

- If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

V.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 our spirits and live!

V.10:

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

V.11:

- 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.

V.12:

- Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.

V.13:

- “Make level paths for your feet,”(Prov 4:26) so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.5-6: The author believes he is doing them a favor by reminding them of Prov 3:11-12. How does he describe his words to his readers? [Words of encouragement]

Q: Would you read these words as “encouragement? [Probably not! It’s not what the readers probably wanted to hear!]

Q: Pretend you’re the author. Why would you write this to a group of discouraged Hebrew Christians? [Let folks engage this - The writer viewed *the trials of the Christian life as spiritual discipline that could help a believer mature*. Instead of trying to escape the difficulties of life, we should rather be “exercised” by them so that we might grow (Heb. 12:11). In other words, running from what is hard is not the answer. Maturity doesn’t come without these trials which are a part of our lives.]

Point of Interest: The key words in this quotation are “son,” “children,” and “sons.” These words are used six times in Hebrews 12:5–8. *They refer to ADULT sons and not little children. (The word “children” in Heb. 12:5 should be “sons.”) A parent who would repeatedly chasten an infant child would be considered a monster. God deals with us as adult sons because we have been adopted and given an adult standing in His family* (see Rom. 8:14–18; Gal. 4:1–7). The fact that the Father chastens us is proof that we are maturing, and it is the means by which we can mature even more.

Q: How do you think Satan wants us to view hardships, trials, or suffering in our lives? [Satan wants us to believe that the difficulties of life are proof that God does *not* love us, but just the opposite is true. Chastening is the evidence of the Father's love.]

Q v.7-10: Have you ever watched kids who don't belong to you act out in a grocery store or be disrespectful to their parents? [Yes] Have you ever been tempted to discipline them yourself?!!

Q: So why do we not discipline someone else's child? [Because they aren't ours!]

EXACTLY! The point the writer makes is that a father chastens *only his own sons*, and this is proof that they *are* His children.

Q: Besides helping us mature as believers, what is another important reason that any father would discipline his own children? [So that they might show them reverence (respect) and obey what he commands. This is why the Heavenly Father corrects us: He wants us to reverence Him and obey His will. A child who does not learn to respect authority will never become a useful, mature adult.]

Observation: I bet all of us grew up hearing from our parents, "This is going to hurt us more than it will hurt you" before they disciplined us. I bet you've said this to your own children! Just as you didn't enjoy disciplining your children, our Father doesn't enjoy having to discipline His children, but the benefits afterward make the chastening an evidence of His love.

Q v.11: According to V.11, what are some of the benefits? [There is "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." Instead of continuing to sin, the child strives to do what is right. Second, there is peace]

Q: What does a "harvest of righteousness" look like? [Instead of continuing to sin, the child strives to do what is right]

Q: What do you think a "harvest of peace" looks like? [The rebellion has ceased and the child is in a loving fellowship with the Father.]

Point of Interest: Discipline encourages us to *exercise* in spiritual matters—the Word of God, prayer, meditation, witnessing, etc. All of this leads to a new *joy*. Paul describes it: "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

Conclusion V.12-13: Of course, the important thing is how we, as God's children, respond to discipline. We can despise it (make light of it) or faint under it (lose heart) per Heb. 12:5, both of which are wrong. We should show reverence to the Father by submitting to His will (Heb. 12:9), using the experience to exercise himself spiritually (Heb. 12:11; 1 Tim. 4:7–8).

These last two verses sound like a coach's orders to his team! Lift up your hands! Strengthen those knees! (Isa. 35:3) Get those lazy feet on the track! (Prov. 4:26) On your mark, get set, GO!

LOOK:

We have two choices as to how we internalize God's discipline toward us. We can either believe a lie that says "God must not love me," or we can appreciate that He loves us enough to do so. I think it's fair to assume that as long as we are God's children, there will be times in our lives that we are being disciplined. This isn't going away. That's why I think we're better off appreciating God's discipline.

Q: So how will we appreciate God's discipline going forward?

A: Remember the benefits – a harvest of righteousness and peace. Because He's doing what is for our good, we will get to share in His holiness.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 323-325). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The Assurance of the Love of God (Heb. 12:5–13)

The key word in this section is *chastening*. It is a Greek word that means “child training, instruction, discipline.” A Greek boy was expected to “work out” in the gymnasium until he reached his maturity. It was a part of his preparation for adult life. The writer viewed the trials of the Christian life as spiritual discipline that could help a believer mature. Instead of trying to escape the difficulties of life, we should rather be “exercised” by them so that we might grow (Heb. 12:11).

When we are suffering, it is easy to think that God does not love us. So the writer gave three proofs that chastening comes from the Father’s heart of love.

***The Scriptures* (vv. 5–6).** The quotation is from Proverbs 3:11–12, a statement that his readers had known but had forgotten. (This is one of the sad consequences of getting “dull” toward the Word; see Heb. 5:11–12.) This quotation (Heb. 12:5–6) is an “exhortation,” which literally means “encouragement.” Because they forgot the Word, they lost their encouragement and were ready to give up!

The key words in this quotation are “son,” “children,” and “sons.” These words are used six times in Hebrews 12:5–8. They refer to *adult sons* and not little children. (The word “children” in Heb. 12:5 should be “sons.”) A parent who would repeatedly chasten an *infant* child would be considered a monster. God deals with us as *adult sons* because we have been adopted and given an adult standing in His family (see Rom. 8:14–18; Gal. 4:1–7). The fact that the Father chastens us is proof that we are maturing, and it is the means by which we can mature even more.

Chastening is the evidence of the Father’s love. Satan wants us to believe that the difficulties of life are proof that God does *not* love us, but just the opposite is true. Sometimes God’s chastening is seen in His *rebukes* from the Word or from circumstances. At other times He shows His love by *punishing* (“the Lord ... scourgeth”) us with some physical suffering. Whatever the experience, we can be sure that His chastening hand is controlled by His loving heart. The Father does not want us to be pampered babies; He wants us to become mature adult sons and daughters who can be trusted with the responsibilities of life.

***Personal experience* (vv. 7–11).** All of us had a father and, if this father was faithful, he had to discipline us. If a child is left to himself, he grows up to become a selfish tyrant. The point the writer made (Heb. 12:7–8) is that a father chastens *only his own sons*, and this is proof that they *are* his children. We may feel like spanking the neighbors’ children (and our neighbors may feel like spanking ours), but we cannot do it. God’s chastening is proof that we are indeed His children!

I have met in my ministry people who professed to be saved, but for some reason they never experienced any chastening. If they disobeyed, they seemed to get away with it. If I resisted God’s will and did not experience His loving chastening, I would be afraid that I was not saved! All true children of God receive His chastening. All others who claim to be saved, but who escape chastening, are nothing but counterfeits—illegitimate children.

Why do good earthly fathers correct their kids? So that their offspring might show them reverence (respect) and obey what they command. This is why the Heavenly Father corrects us: He wants us to reverence Him and obey His will. A child who does not learn subjection to

authority will never become a useful, mature adult. Any of God's children who rebel against His authority are in danger of death! "Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" (Heb. 12:9) The suggestion is that, if we do not submit, *we might not live*. "There is a sin unto death" (1 John 5:16).

We can see now how this twelfth chapter relates to the five exhortations in Hebrews. As a Christian drifts from the Word and backslides, the Father chastens him to bring him back to the place of submission and obedience. (If God does not chasten, that person is not truly born again.) If a believer *persists* in resisting God's will, God may permit his life to be taken. Rather than allow His child to ruin his life further, and disgrace the Father's name, God might permit him to die. God killed thousands of rebellious Jews in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:1–12). Why should He spare us? Certainly this kind of chastening is not His usual approach, but it is possible; and we had better show Him reverence and fear. He chastens us for our profit so that we might share His holy character.

The blessed results (vv. 11–13). No chastening at the time is pleasant either to the father or to his son, but the benefits are profitable. I am sure that few children believe it when their parents say, "This hurts me more than it hurts you." But it is true just the same. The Father does not enjoy having to discipline His children, but the benefits afterward make the chastening an evidence of His love.

What are some of the benefits? For one thing, there is "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." Instead of continuing to sin, the child strives to do what is right. There is also peace instead of war—"the peaceable fruit of righteousness." The rebellion has ceased and the child is in a loving fellowship with the Father. Chastening also encourages a child to *exercise* in spiritual matters—the Word of God, prayer, meditation, witnessing, etc. All of this leads to a new *joy*. Paul describes it: "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

Of course, the important thing is how God's child responds to chastening. He can despise it or faint under it (Heb. 12:5), both of which are wrong. He should show reverence to the Father by submitting to His will (Heb. 12:9), using the experience to exercise himself spiritually (Heb. 12:11; 1 Tim. 4:7–8). Hebrews 12:12–13 sound like a coach's orders to his team! Lift up your hands! Strengthen those knees! (Isa. 35:3) Get those lazy feet on the track! (Prov. 4:26) On your mark, get set, GO!

The example of God's Son, and the assurance of God's love, certainly should encourage us to endure in the difficult Christian race. But there is a third resource.

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, p. 810). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

THE REMINDER THAT THINGS ARE NOT AS BAD AS THEY SEEM (12:3–11)

Nothing is more natural for a person than to overestimate the severity of his trials. The writer did not want his audience to do that.

12:3–4. If they would **consider the opposition from sinful men** which Jesus confronted and **endured** (*hypomenēkota*; cf. vv. 1–2, 7), they would be encouraged. After all, unlike Him, they had **not yet resisted ... sin ... to the point of bloodshed**. By "sin" the author probably primarily meant that of "sinful men" who opposed them, but doubtless also had their own sin in mind, which they had to resist in order to maintain a steadfast Christian profession.

12:5–8. The readers also seemed to **have forgotten** the **encouragement** found in Proverbs 3:11–12, which presents divine **discipline** as an evidence of divine love. Thus they should not **lose heart** (cf. Heb. 12:3) but should **endure hardship** (*hypomenete*, lit., “persevere”; cf. vv. 1–3) **as discipline** and regard it as an evidence of sonship, that is, that they are being trained for the glory of the many sons (cf. 2:10 and comments there). All God’s children are subject to His discipline, and in the phrase **everyone undergoes discipline** the writer for the last time used the Greek *metochoi* (“companions, sharers”), also used in 1:9; 3:1, 14; 6:4. (Lit., the Gr. reads, “... discipline, of which all have become sharers.”) In speaking of those who **are not disciplined** and **are thus illegitimate children**, he was probably thinking of Christians whose disloyalty to the faith resulted in their loss of inheritance (i.e., reward) which is acquired by the many sons and daughters. (In the Roman world, an “illegitimate child” had no inheritance rights.) What such Christians undergo, the author had shown, is severe judgment. On the other hand believers who undergo God’s “discipline” are being prepared by this educational process (*paideia*, “discipline,” lit., “child-training”; cf. Eph. 6:4) for millennial reward.

12:9–11. Drawing on the analogy of the discipline of earthly **fathers**, the author encouraged a submissive spirit to the discipline of **the Father of our spirits** which is life-preserving (**and live**) as well as productive of an experience of **His holiness**, which involves a rich **harvest of righteousness and peace**. But Christians must let this discipline have its full effect and be **trained by it**.

3. THE CALL TO RENEWED SPIRITUAL VITALITY (12:12–13)

12:12–13. The author sensed the tendency to spiritual weakness in his readers, and in the light of the truths he had expounded he encouraged them to renew their strength. If they would do this and would pursue the **level paths** which real righteousness entails, the weakest among them (**the lame**) would not be further **disabled, but rather healed**. Their own strength would benefit weaker Christians.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 1837). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

12:6–8 Some people argue that, contrary to Prov 12:21 and 19:23, these verses in Hebrews say that God disciplines those whom He loves and that, if He does not discipline you, then you are not a child of God. These verses, however, actually teach that God benevolently disciplines His children just like any father who loves his children would do. If any professing child of God does not experience such correction, then he has an unregenerate heart and is not genuinely born of God. This teaching is in keeping with Prov 3:12 (also cited in Heb 12:6), which says, “For the LORD disciplines the one He loves, just as a father, the son he delights in.” Further, Heb 12:10 teaches that God disciplines His children for their good, so they may share in His holiness.