

The Love of God's Discipline

Hebrews 12:4-11

Online Sermon:

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How does one throw off everything that hinders our walk with God and “run the race, fight the good fight, and finish well”¹ in the face of the debilitating anguish of hardships? Day and night believers constantly battle against both external and



internal sin. Since those who are perishing still see the cross as foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18) and fear approaching the light because it would expose their evil (John 3:20), they often become instruments of persecution of those who put their faith in the way, truth,

and life (John 14:6). The struggle to defend ourselves against the sinners attacking us is not an easy one² and as such to avoid the rejection, verbal criticisms, and attempts to “assassinate” our

character and alienate us from the public arena of approval the elect are often tempted to give into the temptation to imitate the world³ so that they might stop inflicting upon us pain and accept us as their own!

To help believers endure the hardships and not grow weary and lose heart (12:3)⁴ we are to remember that in the face of far greater opposition a cloud of great witnesses and especially Christ Himself⁵ were able to remain steadfast in their desire to do the will of God the Father in heaven.

It is one thing to endure the sinful hostility of one's adversaries⁶ for His name's sake (Matthew 5:10) but how does one handle the excruciating painful hardship of being disciplined by the Lord? When the wrath of the One who ushered in the Twelve Plagues of Egypt, smote the inhabitants of Canaan and Sodom and Gomorrah, and is about to cast the Devil and his demons eternally into the lake of fire casts His punishment upon you, how or is it even possible to endure? To cope are we to make light of His discipline by assigning the hardship to the mere byproduct of living in a fallen world? Are we to view the Lord's

¹ John Piper, [Sermons from John Piper \(1990–1999\)](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

² Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida, [A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 292.

³ R. Albert Mohler Jr., [Exalting Jesus in Hebrews](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), Heb 12:4–11.

⁴ John Piper, [Sermons from John Piper \(1990–1999\)](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul](#), vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 168.

⁶ John Piper, [Sermons from John Piper \(1990–1999\)](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

rebuke and chastening of us as “an angry God pounding away at a wicked sinner” to punitively correct our wayward behavior or is there a better way to view His discipline? How does our response to the Lord’s discipline affect whether it leads to a harvest of peace and righteousness? In the following sermon we are going to review Hebrews 12:4-11 to find the motive and intended blessings of the Lord’s discipline!

Our Attitude Towards God’s Discipline

Since one “cannot be profoundly influenced (or encouraged) by that which we do not know,”⁷ in the face of hardship the author of Hebrews invites us to read and understand the implications of Proverbs 3:1-12.⁸ For those who are struggling with sin in the form of sinful persecutors one is to rejoice that “God’s sovereign hand is at work” for it is by faithful perseverance and His sustaining grace that God often allows us to experience hardships in order to train us⁹ to be holy as He is holy! It is often through suffering, pain, and persecutions that we experience a “renewed confidence in His providential care”¹⁰

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, [Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul](#), vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 169.

⁸ Donald Guthrie, [Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 15, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 253.

⁹ John Piper, [Sermons from John Piper \(1990–1999\)](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

¹⁰ Raymond Brown, [The Message of Hebrews: Christ above All](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 232.

and a fresh willingness to draw nearer and submit to His right to rule over our lives. For those struggling with hardship that comes from the Lord’s discipline the author of Hebrews invites the reader to remember that God does not rebuke and chastise us as “an angry God against an unholy sinner” but does so as a



loving Father correcting His child.¹¹ The Jewish congregation in which this letter addressed, who were familiar with the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, knew the Proverbs passage to mean that “God purged the sins of His children by sufferings designed to lead one to repentance”¹² so that one’s relationship with God might grow in righteousness (Psalms 119:67, 71, 75).¹³ Not only should one not fear God unjustly disciplining His own, neither should one make light of it or let His chastisement lead to one’s dismay!¹⁴ For discipline to reach its goal of training us in holiness we must resist the urge to dismiss the hardships as the

¹¹ Peter T. O’Brien, [The Letter to the Hebrews](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 464.

¹² Craig S. Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Heb 12:5–7.

¹³ R. Albert Mohler Jr., [Exalting Jesus in Hebrews](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), Heb 12:4–11.

¹⁴ Donald Guthrie, [Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 15, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 254.

product of living in a fallen world lest we miss out on its significance as an invitation for us to repent.¹⁵

We are to remember that God's discipline is not done vindictively¹⁶ and meant to drive us to despair¹⁷ but is to be seen as the firm guidance and correction of the Father who loves us His children and desires that they might obtain the "whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11) in their lives!

Reflection. When persecuted do you trust in God's sovereignty and persevere so that you might become more mature in the faith? When you are in the throes of hardship do you stop and ask God if your difficult times are a product of His mighty hand of discipline? Despite feeling pain and anguish do you also feel the Father's love when being disciplined?

¹⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul](#), vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 169.

¹⁶ Donald Guthrie, [Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 15, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 254.

¹⁷ Raymond Brown, [The Message of Hebrews: Christ above All](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 233.

¹⁸ R. Kent Hughes, [Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul](#), vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 170.

Remembering God Discipline's His Own

The author of Hebrews boldly states that all hardships that we face, either persecution at the hand of sinners, trials and tribulations of living in a fallen world, or God's corrective hand of rebuke or chastisement;¹⁸ are to be endured with the view that



God has not abandoned us but instead is correcting and training us to become righteous in His sight! In antiquity fathers invested a significant amount of time disciplining their children because as their heirs they were about to inherit their responsibilities.¹⁹ Even though it offends many of this "modern age where permissiveness"²⁰ is preferred over discipline, not "sparing the rod" imparts upon our children wisdom by equipping and molding them in the ways they should go (Proverbs 13:24, 22:6).²¹ If God did not train and correct the believer's behavior, then He "would be deficient in His capacity

¹⁹ Donald Guthrie, [Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 15, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 255.

²⁰ Donald Guthrie, [Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 15, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 254.

²¹ Philip H Hacking, [Opening up Hebrews](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 83.

as our Father!”²² Even though discipline is excruciatingly painful and often humiliating we are not to see it as an “effect of God’s hate, but of His love.”²³ God’s discipline of believers is not to be associated with God’s wrath with the intent of our calamity²⁴ but instead as His loving training and guidance with the intent of transforming us to become holy. When experiencing discipline, we are not being treated like an enemy²⁵ but as legitimate children of God for “who would ever discipline someone else’s child?”²⁶

God allows us to go through hardships of persecution and discipline so that we might be corrected, learn to trust in His sovereign hand, grow in the faith²⁷ and be fruitful in the divine roles He has assigned us!

“Paternal discipline is not only an integral part of our earthly family life”²⁸ but the author of Hebrews boldly and rightly states without God’s discipline in one’s life then you are not legitimate, true sons and daughters at all (8)!

²² Donald Guthrie, [Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 15, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 254.

²³ John Piper, [Sermons from John Piper \(1990–1999\)](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

²⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul](#), vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 170.

²⁵ John Piper, [Sermons from John Piper \(1990–1999\)](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

Reflection. While most people today see discipline to be avoided at all costs, is there not great value in knowing one’s boundaries and living within the confines of what it means to be holy and pleasing to our Father in heaven? When we ignore God’s correction are we not defiantly saying we know a better way to live our lives and in doing so miss out on having our character molded by He who knit out in our mother’s womb? When hardship is the product of a sinful persecutor do you see how God can use such a situation for one’s own good? Do you truly believe that “in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28)?

Learning From God’s Discipline

A father who truly loves their children will discipline them so that they might “realize their potential and come to maturity.”²⁹ Discipline need not be seen as “stern or harsh” but as “learning that molds character and enforces correct

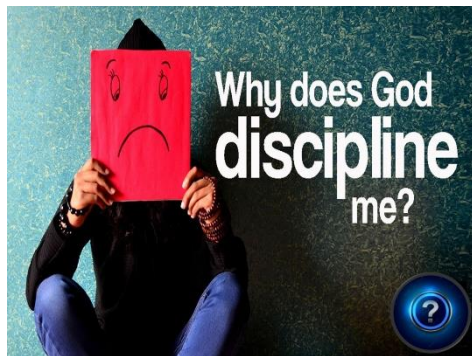
²⁶ R. Albert Mohler Jr., [Exalting Jesus in Hebrews](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), Heb 12:4–11.

²⁷ Peter T. O’Brien, [The Letter to the Hebrews](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 465.

²⁸ Peter T. O’Brien, [The Letter to the Hebrews](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 465.

²⁹ Raymond Brown, [The Message of Hebrews: Christ above All](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 234.

behavior.”³⁰ It is at this point that the author of Hebrews outlines the similarities and differences of “earthly” and heavenly discipline.³¹ In the ancient world fathers had “the right and the obligation” to provide discipline and instruction for their children.³² The child would accept and often respect their father’s discipline because it was seen as done in love and being treated as a “legitimate” heir to take over his livelihood. If an earthly father has the authority to discipline,



then the sovereign Creator of all things seen and unseen (Colossians 1:16) has infinitely more authority to do so!³³ As heirs of God the Father in heaven we as His children are to gladly submit to His right and authority to rule over us because His discipline is an “essential feature of true life” in His Son Jesus!³⁴ The method of discipline of our earthly and heavenly Father uses

is markedly different as well. If our earthly fathers are candid³⁵ with us then they must admit that their discipline was often far from perfect. Their motives were sometimes influenced by personal whims, and their own bad day experiences often resulted in too lax or too harsh judgments and subsequent punishments of their children.³⁶ In contrast God the Father’s discipline is far more positive for it is never “capricious, ill-formed or ill-tempered.”³⁷

*He who is perfect in His knowledge and love for us only disciplines us in a manner that is one hundred percent of the time flawless, for our good and done with the intent of us learning how to share in His holiness.*³⁸

And unlike our earthly fathers who only disciplined for a limited number of years, i.e. until we reached the age of maturity,³⁹ thankfully our Father, the Potter, will never stop correcting and molding us until we reach “entire sanctification which will one

³⁰ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Discipline,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 631.

³¹ Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 15, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 255.

³² Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 466–467.

³³ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 467.

³⁴ Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 15, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 255.

³⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 173–174.

³⁶ Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews: Christ above All*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 234–235.

³⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 174.

³⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 344.

³⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 343.

day be consummated in the manifestation with Christ in glory!”⁴⁰ Those who want to live in the fullest do not “buck God’s discipline” but rather join king David in his cry “search me, O God, and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalms 139:23-24). David felt this way even when the “lead me” was God’s gracious hand of discipline!

Reflection: Has your earthly father ever disciplined you too lenient or too harsh? Do you rejoice in God’s discipline knowing that it trains you to become holy as He is holy? How great it is to have the Potter mold the clay back into the image in which you were formed!

Reaping the Harvest

God not only disciplines us for our good so that we might share in His holiness but also to produce in our lives a harvest of righteousness and peace. It is at this point that the author of Hebrews acknowledges that our struggle against sin in the form

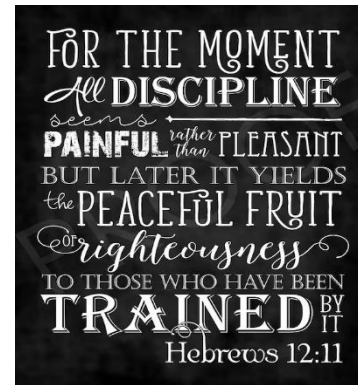
⁴⁰ F. F. Bruce, [The Epistle to the Hebrews](#), Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 344.

⁴¹ R. Kent Hughes, [Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul](#), vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 174.

⁴² R. Kent Hughes, [Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul](#), vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 174.

⁴³ Peter T. O’Brien, [The Letter to the Hebrews](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 469.

of persecution from sinful people or rebuke and chastisement from the Lord is not pleasant but rather painful. We are not called by God to be “pious masochists”⁴¹ who enjoy being persecuted and corrected by God. No one enjoys receiving a spanking, having our privileges suspended, a possession removed, an injury occurred, or a chronic illness obtained!⁴² What we are called to do is to look beyond the “superficial pain”⁴³ and view the outcome of being trained by discipline that is always for our good, “substantial and pleasant.”⁴⁴ The believer who accepts God’s discipline as an



opportunity to be trained to learn how to be holy will “cease to feel resentful and rebellious”⁴⁵ and will have fertile soil in their hearts in which will produce a harvest of righteousness and peace. While not all things that a believer experiences in their lives are good, all things “are for the good and edification” (Romans 8:28)⁴⁶ of those who chose to see discipline’s benefit of correcting one’s wayward behavior and for maturing one’s

⁴⁴ Peter T. O’Brien, [The Letter to the Hebrews](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 470.

⁴⁵ F. F. Bruce, [The Epistle to the Hebrews](#), Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 346.

⁴⁶ R. Albert Mohler Jr., [Exalting Jesus in Hebrews](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), Heb 12:4–11.

faith!⁴⁷ “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain, it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”⁴⁸

It is by listening to the Lord's correction of having sinned and by listening to the invitation of maturing in the faith by being persecuted for His name's sake, that one overcomes the fragmentation of the sinful nature⁴⁹ and experiences righteousness and the “peace of quietness and confidence forever” (Isaiah 32:17) that the Lord always does good to those who love Him.

This is why those who suffer greatly from persecution or rebuke from the Lord can joyfully join apostle Paul and state, “for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Corinthians 4:17). Suffering is never in vain⁵⁰ for those who put their faith in the Lord!

Reflection. Think about some of the most difficult times of your life. During those times did you see past the pain and see it as the loving hand of training and guidance of the Lord to help you become holy and obtain a harvest of peace in your life? Are you

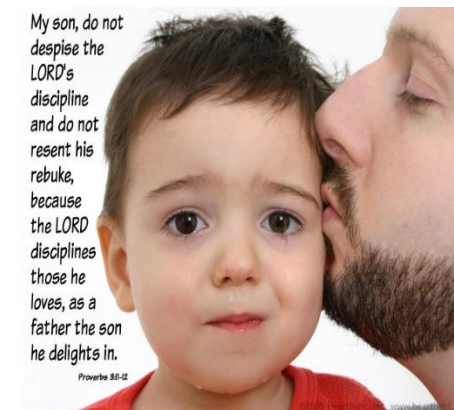
⁴⁷ R. Albert Mohler Jr., [Exalting Jesus in Hebrews](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), Heb 12:4–11.

⁴⁸ Philip H Hacking, [Opening up Hebrews](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 84.

currently going through pain of financial, marital issues, persecution, or suffering from some chronic disease? Can you see how experiencing such pain can end up being for your good? Are you at peace with the way in which you are living your life because you are trusting a sovereign God that His hand of discipline is always righteous and useful in correcting and training you to be holy?

Conclusion

While our struggles in the face of trials and tribulations, persecution and being corrected by the Lord are not pleasant at the time the key to enduring and being sanctified through them



is by perceiving them as one of God's ways He chooses to spur one onto continuous transformation that reflects His holiness. Even when we experience the excruciating pain of being disciplined by the mighty hand of the Lord we are not to view it as the punishment of an angry

God on a wicked sinner but instead as the loving, graceful hand

⁴⁹ R. Kent Hughes, [Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul](#), vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 174.

⁵⁰ Raymond Brown, [The Message of Hebrews: Christ above All](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 235.

of our sovereign Father who wants to impart His wisdom upon us so that we might be equipped and molded to do the divine tasks He has graciously assigned to us. In the face of His discipline we are to rejoice that we are not being treated like His enemies whom He pours out His wrath but instead as His child and heir, expected and empowered to do great things in His name! Since we respected our earthly fathers for their often-flawed discipline of us until maturity, how much more ought we respect our Father who art in heaven who in His perfect knowledge of us and eternal love promises to never stop correcting and molding us until we reach the entire sanctification which will only be consummated in the manifestation with Christ in His glory? The glorious truth is that while God's discipline is not pleasant at the time we are to persevere and rejoice that our Father does so that we might share in His holiness and in turn we will receive a harvest of righteousness and peace! So, the next time the Lord's hand feels like it is going to break you stop, repent, cast your eyes upon Jesus and let Him fill your heart with the glorious truth, suffering is not in vain because the Good Shepherd always does good to those who love Him!