

LEANING INTO THE FATHER'S LOVE

WEEK 4: GOD'S DISCIPLINE

“The purpose of God’s discipline is not to punish us but to transform us.” Jerry Bridges

“‘Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.’ Many believers are deeply grieved because they do not at once feel they have been profited by their afflictions. But one does not expect to see apples or plums on a tree that was planted a week ago. Only little children put their seeds into their flower garden and then expect to see them grow into plants in an hour. Sometimes the good of our troubles may not come to us for years afterwards, when, perhaps getting into a somewhat similar experience, we are helped to bear it by the remembrance of having endured the like ten or twenty years ago.” Charles Spurgeon

DISCIPLINE DEMONSTRATES LOVE

“My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, ¹² for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.” (Prov. 3:11-12; quoted in Heb. 12:5-6)

“Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O Lord, and whom you teach out of your law, ¹³ to give him rest from days of trouble, until a pit is dug for the wicked.” (Psalm 94:12-13)

“Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty. ¹⁸ For he wounds, but he binds up; he shatters, but his hands heal.” (Job 5:17-18)

- **Love seeks the other’s good and is committed to what is best for them.**
- **Love requires honesty and truthfulness.**
- **Love aims to protect someone from danger, harm, error, and foolishness.**
 - Through discipline, a child learns they aren’t autonomous or the authority but are responsible and under the leadership of another. If they don’t learn this lesson, they’ll not only be bad kids but bad employees, bad citizens, bad church members, and bad Christians because they think God is their simply for affirmation and not as the authority.
 - Through discipline, a child learns they don’t know everything about everything, and so need to listen to the wisdom and advice of others with more wisdom than them. This creates humility and fights pride but also helps them see the value of learning from others.
 - Through discipline, a child learns that actions have consequences, including consequences where we are responsible to others.
 - Through discipline, a child is instructed to prevent them from getting hurt or from danger.
 - Through discipline, a child is trained toward good beliefs, habits, skills, and practices rather than being left to cultivate bad ones.
- **Parental discipline is proof that there is a special relationship with the child and a unique responsibility to care for and shepherd them.**

“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.” (Ps. 119:67; see 119:65-72, 75)

“But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.” (1 Cor. 11:32)

“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” (Rev. 3:19-20)

Parental Discipline: Prov. 12:11; 13:24; 19:18; 22:6; 23:13-15; 29:15-17; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21; Dt. 21:18.

DEFINING DISCIPLINE

God’s discipline in the Bible has a much wider range of meaning than our initial negative connotations. It can be corrective, a rebuke or reproof, but discipline also conveys the ideas of instruction, teaching, and training. The *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* describes discipline as:

“Learning that molds character and enforces correct behavior; from a Latin word meaning ‘instruction’ or ‘training.’ To discipline a person or a group means to put them in a state of good order so that they function in the way intended. Discipline, in spite of a popular misconception, is not inherently stern or harsh. Bible translators chose ‘disciple’ as an appropriate term for one who learns by following.”¹

The Greek word for discipline (*paideia*) was a significant part of the Greek way of teaching. You can still see this in use today with a quick online search. It combines many ideas—teaching, strictness for habit or skill formation, guidance, learning, passing on knowledge—and it aimed to include moral, intellectual, and physical training. This partly helps us understand the rigorous commitment in Greek literature to physical training (think of the Olympics), intellectual pursuits, character development or virtue, and beauty in literature and art.

“The key word in this quotation [from Hebrews 12] which the author develops is *paideia*, whose meaning ranges between training and corporal punishment. Generally speaking, it refers to education in Greek tradition and to discipline by punishment in Hebrew tradition. The word combines training, instruction, guidance, reproof, correction, and punishment. The use of the term ‘rebuke’ indicates verbal correction as well.”²

Discipline is being intentional in one thing to help accomplish a larger purpose. William Boekestein summarizes, “God’s discipline of his children is his comprehensive training plan for our maturity.”³

“This is how a loving father treats his genuine children... Not limited to punishment for wrongdoing, although that cannot be excluded entirely. It is training toward maturity based on orderly instruction and correction when needed (Acts 7:22; 22:3; Eph 6:4; 2 Tim 3:16; Titus 2:12). It is positive, directing us down right paths of conduct and testing us to bring greater strength and maturity. It is also negative, rebuking and correcting us when we go astray. God uses our struggles and suffering—whether innocent or deserved—to train us in holiness (v. 10).”⁴ Douglas Moo

¹ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). [Discipline](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 1, p. 631). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

² Allen, D. L. (2010). [Hebrews](#) (p. 580). Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group.

³ William Boekestein, <https://www.reformedfellowship.net/thriving-under-gods-discipline-trading-temporary-pain-for-eternal-gain>

⁴ Moo, D. J. (2018). [The Letters and Revelation](#). In D. A. Carson (Ed.), *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible* (pp. 2219–2220). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

TWO SIDES OF DISCIPLINE

Training = Loving Instruction + Loving Correction

It can help to think of the “two sides of discipline,” where we teach and train people by instructing them in what is good or right (Heb. 12:11; 2 Tim. 3:16; Ps. 94:12) but also apply correction to what is wrong or potentially destructive (Heb. 12:6; 2 Sam. 7:14). Both instruction and correction are done in love and with loving purposes. We instruct in what is good, right, and true for the purpose of training a child toward a certain goal, end, or destination. If and when they start to veer off course, we correct them to explain what’s happened (and why it’s problematic) while re-instructing them in what is right.

Training as Instruction

See Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 12:11; Ps. 94:12;

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the *discipline* and instruction of the Lord.” (Eph. 6:4)

God’s discipline includes his “positive” training and teaching to form us as disciples being transformed by the Spirit into Christ’s likeness, or sons and daughters reflecting the image of the Father. The Bible as a whole is God’s counsel and wisdom to instruct us. He teaches us many things in it and promises to be our God who is with us and for us. Part of the instruction is teaching us how to live these truths, promises, and commandments out in our own life. God then allows us to put our head-knowledge into practice in various ways, one of which might be allowing us to experience a trial where we have to then believe with our heart and put into practice what we’ve learned. Will we apply the lesson? Will we “confirm” and develop this knowledge by trusting in God to be our provider and turning to him for help? Or will we turn to other idols or sources, including ourselves, to provide in our life and show we need to relearn this spiritual lesson about God as provider?

Training as Correction

While not all discipline is correction or rebuke, that clearly is or can be an aspect of God’s discipline. Just as a parent both proactively teaches their child to train them and then corrects them—sometimes with disciplinary action—when they disobey or fail to learn the lesson, God our Father does the same. His correction is part of his love, proof of his love, and performed in love.

“When a body part has been injured, it requires the pain and labor of physical therapy. But that physical therapy is not punitive; it is intended to bring healing. It is out of care for that limb that the physical therapy is assigned.” Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*

- Discipline aims to ultimately lead us into a life and ways that will give peace and rest rather than strife and trouble (Ps. 94:12-13). “Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O Lord, and whom you teach out of your law, ¹³ to give him rest from days of trouble, until a pit is dug for the wicked.” (Psalm 94:12-13)
- Discipline aims to correct us from our straying and bring us back to God’s wise and life-giving path (Ps. 119:67) “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.” (Ps. 119:67)
- Discipline aims to ultimately save us from making lasting mistakes that could lead to condemnation, guilt, or death (1 Cor. 11:32). “But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.” (1 Cor. 11:32)

- Discipline aims to get sin out of the way that interferes with our walk with God—and, therefore, robs us of joy and peace—and restore us into nearness and fellowship (Reve. 3:19-20). “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” (Rev. 3:19-20)
- Discipline involves God’s reproof but it’s done with grace and for the purpose of healing. “Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty. ¹⁸ For he wounds, but he binds up; he shatters, but his hands heal.” (Job 5:17-18)

Trials as Testing & Training (Discipline)

One way to approach trials is to view them as discipline in the sense of teaching, training, and instructing us. All trials can train us by showing us who God is, teaching us or reinforcing key truths in real-life scenarios, revealing areas we have grown or need to grow, or giving us a chance to put into practice what God has taught us. Like how a good parent seeks to find teaching opportunities in ordinary moments, every trial can be part of God growing us, teaching us, or refining us. In other words, God is parenting us all the time. We don’t have to view every trial as God’s corrective discipline and wonder what we’ve done wrong—though we should always be reflective of any sin in our life—but we can view any trial as an opportunity for God to train us and grow us into maturity.

Part of the process of enduring trials and seeing them as God’s discipline is self-reflection. Self-reflection can include confessing sin or asking God to reveal sin, wrong beliefs or thoughts, bad habits, idols, or areas of needed growth, but it can also be self-reflection that asks God to help you remember what is true, to lean into and trust God and his promises, or to recall things he’s taught you so you can now apply the lesson. The emphasis here is less on trying to discover a sin God must be correcting—though we don’t rule this out altogether—and more on reflecting on what God has taught us, might be teaching us, or how he’s training us. D. A. Carson writes:

“...it follows that when we face suffering of any kind, we should use the occasion for self-examination. God *may* be speaking to us in the language of a wise heavenly Father who chastens those he loves. Such chastening *may* be God’s response to specific sins in our lives; it *may* be a more general way of toughening us up in this broken world so we will stop thinking that God owes us good health, or that our clean living and organic food guarantees us long and robust life... So our self-examination ought to be honest, and any repentance should be forthright—but we should not whip ourselves into thinking that the crippling accident we just endured was a function of our sin. Even if it were, the remedy is always the same: flee to the Cross, and trust our good and gracious and holy God. And it’s not inconceivable that we may conclude, with Job, that this suffering cannot be God’s punishment for specific sins in our lives.”⁵

We don’t learn only from trials, adversity, or affliction and God does teach us through blessings or simply through his Word, but we often learn best through trials. In affliction, our knowledge is put to the test. In adversity, we learn truths not just in the head but in the gut and the heart. C. S. Lewis famously put it this way: “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to arouse a deaf world.” God also comforts us with his presence, act on our behalf in power, provide what we need, and even protect us and sustain in trials, so training isn’t the only thing going on in trials, but it can be one thing to consider. Richard Philipps explains it this way:

⁵ D. A. Carson, “How Does God Discipline Christians?” <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-does-god-discipline-christians/>

“The writer tells us two things God does to raise us right, beginning with fatherly discipline. The Greek word for this is *paideia*, from the word *pais*, meaning ‘child,’ and speaks of the raising of a child. This is the primary way we should think about God’s treatment of us in our trials. Just as a parent trains up a child, subjecting him or her to a process of education and arranging demanding experiences designed to spur development, so God also leads us through this life. As with a son or daughter in childhood, our whole lives are preparation for the age of maturity that waits for us in the life to come. This explains so many of our trials. God sends us challenges and hardships, not out of spite, but out of paternal love. Trials are designed to make us stronger, to apply force against the muscle of our faith to push us forward toward our spiritual potential.”⁶

Part of our experience in trials is asking God what he wants to teach us or do in us, through us, or for us. What is he wanting us to see, learn, or know? What is he preparing us for? How is he rounding the rough edges off of us and conforming us into Christ’s image? What idols is he releasing us from or ripping away? How does he want to reveal himself to us, prove himself, or help us in this season? God has good purposes in trials, and even though we don’t know what they are, we trust him to be at work.

“have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.’ ¹¹For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” (Heb. 12:5-6, 11)

“To regard God’s discipline lightly means to shrug it off as fate or bad luck. It is to fail to see God’s personal, providential care in *all* that happens to us, from the trivial to the significant. Nothing happens to us by chance. God controls every detail of our lives, down to the very hairs of our head being numbered. If a believer encounters a trial and responds with stoic fatalism, he is regarding God’s discipline lightly. If he grits his teeth and endures it without seeing God’s loving hand in it, he is regarding it lightly. If he does not take the trial to heart by prayerful self-examination, asking God to help him grow through it, he is regarding it lightly.” Steven Cole, bible.org

God’s Good Purposes in Trials

“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” (1 Peter 1:6-9; See also 2 Cor. 12:7ff; 1:3-11)

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28)

“‘Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. ²After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. ³Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.’” (Hosea 6:1-3)

⁶ Phillips, R. D. (2006). [Hebrews](#). (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (p. 543). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.

“This is the ultimate reason, from our standpoint, why God fills our lives with troubles and perplexities of one sort or another—it is to ensure that we shall learn to hold Him fast....God wants us to feel that our way through life is rough and perplexing, so that we may learn thankfully to lean on Him. Therefore He takes steps to drive us out of self-confidence to trust in Himself.” J. I. Packer

“By affliction He teaches us many precious lessons, which, without it we should never learn. By affliction He shows us our emptiness and weakness, draws us to the throne of grace, purifies our affections, weans us from the world, makes us long for heaven. In the resurrection morning we shall all say, “It is good for me that I was afflicted.” We shall thank God for every storm.” J. C. Ryle

Deuteronomy 8 as A Test-Case

“And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. ³ And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. ⁴ Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. ⁵ Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you. So you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. ⁷ For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land” (Deut. 8:2-7)

In Deuteronomy 8 we see that the wilderness, which is a trial and a test, is viewed as part of God’s discipline (8:5) of his people. This is part of how God is teaching, training, instructing and correcting them. He does so:

- 1) to reveal any areas of growth needed or sinfulness in their heart he wants to purify them of
- 2) to help them feel their dependence on God and need for his help
- 3) to strip them of trusting in anything other than God so he alone can directly feed them and protect them
- 4) to teach them about who he is as God and how he will care for them every step of the wilderness and in every single trial they face
- 5) to increase their faith through God’s provision, power, protection, and presence in the trials
- 6) to provide a track-record of God’s faithfulness they can look back on in future trials and fears
- 7) to prepare them for a season of blessing and God’s mission for them as his people
- 8) to teach them know how to enjoy God’s blessing without stealing the credit or ignoring God once things are easier
- 9) to prove God’s ways are good and his commands are to be obeyed—and that they lead to life and joy
- 10) to show that he always leads them with purpose and his plan is to do them good in the end (8:16)

Hebrews 12 as A Test-Case

“And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.’ ⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father

of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” (Heb. 12:5-11)

Hebrews 12 also seems to be an example of where God’s discipline is tied to his purposes in trials as part of his overall training us toward maturity. Jesus is the ultimate example of this as the one who “learned obedience through suffering” (Heb. 5:8) and who endured through suffering (Heb. 12:1–2). The recipients of this letter are a suffering people. They know trials and troubles. And God has good purposes from his people in them. Though their suffering in this letter in large part has to do with the hostility from the world, the author also reminds them we endure by laying aside the sin which trips us up and following Jesus (and by trusting the faithful God in Hebrews 11 and by following the examples of Hebrews 11). Discipline is unpleasant, but it trains us so we can reap the good fruit (Heb. 12:11).

- God’s discipline proves his love and commitment to us as children rather than strangers (12:6-7). It’s when we never experience discipline that we should question God’s covenantal love for us or if we are children, not the opposite (12:8).
- Discipline is never enjoyable or pleasant, but it does bring about good fruit or results (12:11). We don’t base the benefits of or goodness of discipline by what we feel about it in the moment but by God’s purposes that extend beyond the moment.
- We will be tempted to become discouraged or weary in trials, to question God’s kindness, or to disregard or miss what God might be doing in discipline (12:5-6). That’s when remember God’s love in his discipline and his good purposes for us through discipline.
- If we trust our earthly fathers to respect us out of love, with wisdom, and for good purposes, how much more should we trust our Heavenly Father in his perfect discipline (12:9).
- One stated goal of discipline is that we be holy, that we would persevere in faith and be conformed to the image of Christ (12:10; 12:1-2).
- Only those “trained” by discipline benefit from it (12:11). Many will disregard the Lord’s discipline (12:5-6) and see it as a nuisance rather than a training ground, and they will not reap the benefits or harvest of fruit from it (12:11).

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the ways we might disregard God’s discipline and miss what he’s trying to teach us (12:5-6)?
2. How can we allow trials to train us (12:11) so we grow through them rather than just hoping they pass, trying to fix things ourselves, or turning to worldly comforts or idols for our help and missing out on being trained through them?
3. Trials can tempt us to view God as harsh, unloving, or absent? How might viewing trials through the lens of God’s loving discipline help us combat these lies? What do we need to remember about God in trials to think about him rightly?
4. How can you view all trials as potential discipline God wants to use for your good without necessarily connecting every trial to some sin you must have committed? Why is this important?
5. What are some of the benefits or the fruit (12:11) that can come from discipline?

6. How can we look to Christ as our example, our forerunner, and our helper as we endure suffering (Heb. 12:1-2; 10)?
7. How does God's disciple demonstrate his love as a Father rather than cast doubt on his love?
8. Can you recall a time you knew you were experiencing God's corrective discipline? How did God use that to train you or use it for your good?
9. Can you recall a time God has used trial to train you in the sense of growing you, giving you a chance to see who he is, or putting into practice key lessons of the Christian life, such as walking by faith or trusting God alone? What did this look like in your life?

Benefits of Discipline from "The Discipline of the Lord" sermon by Charles

Spurgeon <https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/2374.htm>

- We learn to discern the evil of sin.
- It teaches us the unsatisfactory nature of worldly things.
- Our frailty and weaknesses are exposed.
- We learn the value of prayer.
- We look to the Bible for comfort, wisdom, direction, and power.
- God himself becomes our teacher.
- We learn to rest in the will of God
- We grow in our spiritual education.
- We learn to rest in God's timing for righting wrongs as our just judge.

Recommended Resources

- "[Do Not Regard God's Discipline Lightly](#)" by Kristen Wetherell at ftc.co (For the Church)
- "[How Do I know If I'm Being Disciplined by God?](#)" by John Piper at desiringgod.org/interviews
- "[Thriving Under God's Discipline: Trading Temporary Pain for Eternal Gain](#)," at reformedfellowship.net
- "[The Blessing of God's Discipline](#)" by J. Mark Beach at Ligonier.org
- "[The Discipline of the Lord](#)" and "[The Divine Discipline](#)" by Charles Spurgeon
- "[How Does God Discipline Christians?](#)" by D. A. Carson at thegospelcoalition.org
- [God's Discipline: A Word of Encouragement in the Midst of Hardship](#) by Tim Chester