

Embracing God’s Discipline, Part 2 (Hebrews 12:4–5)

Hebrews chapter 12, beginning at verse 4:

4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprovved by Him;

6 for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.”

7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom His Father does not discipline?

8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (Heb. 12:4–11 NASB)

Embracing God's discipline is not an easy thing. If it were, we would not need the instructions that we have here in Hebrews chapter 12, verses 4–11. If embracing God's discipline were easy, we would not need to be reminded that it is a good thing for us and how it is that we ought to approach His discipline.

There's a very real danger for us as God's children in undergoing His discipline, that we would either despise it—look down upon it and resent it or grow in bitterness—or that we might despair underneath of His discipline. This is the opposite response that the author wants us to have here in Hebrews chapter 12. He wants us to embrace God's discipline, trusting and believing that it is for God's glory and it is for our good and that God will ultimately bring to pass in our lives those things which will produce the peaceful fruits of righteousness: sanctification, holiness without which none of us are going to see the face of God. That is the objective of God's discipline.

It is no accident that this section in Hebrews 12 falls on the heels of, right after, a large section in chapter 11—it's not surprising that twelve follows eleven, but the content,

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that the discipline section follows the great chapter on faith. It is by faith that you and I must embrace God's discipline. It is by faith that we understand and believe His promises concerning all of the afflictions that He has allowed into our lives, ordained for our lives, sent into our lives, and given to us as His gift to us. See, without faith to embrace that, without faith to trust in the good providence and the sovereignty of God, you and I will kick against the goads of God's discipline constantly. We will come up against affliction and discipline and suffering and God's chastening and the rebukes and the reproofs of His Word and of this life, and rather than allowing it to produce in us the holiness that God has intended to produce in us, that which He sends it into our lives to produce, we will kick against it and only be miserable under the Lord's chastening hand instead of embracing what God wants to do and is trying to do—*is doing*, not trying to do, *is doing* through His discipline. God has a purpose, God has an intention in the discipline, and He is accomplishing His good pleasure in it. Now listen, God is going to accomplish His purposes in it. So you can either enjoy it and go along for the ride, embrace it, welcome it, understand it comes to you from the loving hand of God, or you can kick against it. But God will accomplish in your life what He is intending to accomplish.

Last week I suggested that there are two things that we must do to embrace God's discipline in a loving way and in the way that He intends for us to embrace it. Two things that we must remember, I should say—having a proper perspective on God's discipline. That's verses 4 and 5. The first one has to do with our mindset. We have to remember that the afflictions that we endure are less than we deserve. That is verse 4. “You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin.” Those words help frame our perspective on suffering in this life. Whatever affliction comes into our life, whatever suffering it is that God sends and appoints for us, it is not what we deserve. It is certainly less than it could be. We can always remember in the midst of suffering and affliction and under the hand of God's discipline—we can always remember that whatever that affliction is, there are others always who have suffered more than we, and whatever it is that we endure, we could be paying an even greater price. But we will not pay an even greater price because Christ has borne the full wrath of God on our behalf. So we have escaped eternal judgment. But that eternal judgment means that God is going to bring into our lives those things which will purge us of our sin, grow us up, discipline us, train us for lives of righteousness and holiness. That was the first thing. The afflictions that we endure are less than we deserve.

The second thing we have to remember to embrace God's discipline well is that God disciplines His sons and not His enemies. God's discipline is for His sons and not His enemies. Look at verse 5. This is verses 5 and 6, and the relationship that we have as sons of God is developed from verses 6 through 8. Verse 5 is our focus this morning. Hebrews chapter 12, verse 5: “And you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons [and now he's quoting here from Proverbs 3], “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; for

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those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.' ” You and I must remember that whatever afflictions we endure in this life, they are less than we deserve, and God's discipline is reserved only for His sons, not His enemies.

He's reminding these Hebrews of something, in chapter 12, verse 5. He's reminding them of an exhortation that he says is addressed to them as sons. They had forgotten an encouragement regarding God's discipline, and the author wants them to look back at the Old Testament and meditate upon something that was revealed back then, even under the old covenant, concerning how God deals with His people. Proverbs 3:11–12 that he is quoting from here, those verses describe for us not only the mindset in which we embrace discipline, but the manner. The manner of embracing it is the last part of verse 5: “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord [that is, we're not to despise His discipline], nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him.” We're not to despair under His discipline. That's the manner in which we embrace it. But the mindset is in the introductory part of verse 5, the first part of verse 5: “You have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons.” You need to call something back to your memory, something you know to be true, that obviously you have forgotten in your fainting and in your despairing under the hand of God. There's a nugget of truth that you must remember, that is, that God disciplines His children, His sons, and not His enemies.

This is the framework under which all of the other instructions in verses 4–11 are given to us. We have to interpret and understand everything that is said in this passage about God's discipline in light of this. He's describing something that is true of His children, of His people, who are redeemed by Him, adopted into His family. This is not something that applies to unbelievers. This should be a source of tremendous encouragement, and the truth here in verses 5 and 6 is intended to be a source of tremendous encouragement. That's kind of what the word *exhortation* means there. It is a word that describes something that is said for the purpose of kind of coming alongside and being an encouragement in an exhorting way. Not an exhortation like a condemnation type of exhortation where you're trying to drive somebody to something, but rather an exhortation in terms of an encouragement where you're trying to come along and lift somebody up and give them something that should lift their hearts in the midst of their affliction.

They had forgotten the exhortation which was addressed to them as sons, and there are actually two reminders in verse 5. Two reminders. The first, he is reminding them of the exhortation itself. That is, he's quoting here from Proverbs chapter 3 to remind them of what God says concerning discipline. And we'll talk about this in a couple of weeks, but let me give you a little preview of something that is to come. By going back to the book of Proverbs, the author is reminding his audience that this is not just a way that God deals with people under the new covenant. This is how God has dealt with His people

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from way back when, under the old covenant. Solomon said to his son, do not disregard or think lightly of the discipline of the Lord. In other words, just because you're in the new covenant as a child of God, this is not some new way that God deals with His people. God has always disciplined His people.

The second exhortation here is that they are indeed sons, and that is something that is developed down in verses 6–8. Just read those verses with me. “ ‘For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.’ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.” This is a blessing that is uniquely reserved for God's children.

The author is honest with them about the suffering that they had endured. They had been reproached, they had been reviled, they were suffering persecution from family and from friends and from people that they used to work with. And all of that persecution and affliction that has now come into their lives was causing some of them to faint and almost peter out and be exhausted by it. It is not easy undergoing difficult times, suffering and affliction. It's certainly not easy to undergo those things for an extended and long period of time. It wears on you. It wears you down. It can make you get to the point where you just want to give up. You just want to tap out. You want to be done with it. You want to go home to glory, or you just want to be out from underneath of what you perceive as God's disciplining and disfavorable hand upon you. That can cause your heart to just faint and to despair, which is why the author is encouraging them with this. This is how God deals with His people.

Their sufferings were real, and Scripture is honest with us about the sufferings that we can expect in this life. It is through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God, Paul said in Acts chapter 14, verse 22. It's through many tribulations. Have you gone through many tribulations? Not as many as you're going to go through. If you haven't gone through many tribulations, you have more ahead of you. And how do you know when you've gone through your last tribulation? When it's your last tribulation. You step into glory and you say, OK, that was the last one. Then you know that that was the last one. But until you step into glory, it is through many tribulations that you and I must enter the kingdom of God. That is the course that our good and benevolent and loving and all-wise God has laid out for His children. There is a purpose in it. That purpose is our sanctification.

Now, notice the author's approach here. His approach is to remind them of a truth that is revealed in Scripture in the Old Testament, a revelation from God that he says is addressed to them and is something that they had forgotten. He's simply pulling a truth out of the Old Testament and he's saying, look, I want to remind you of this truth. He's bringing it to bear to them, something—not a new revelation in this sense, not new

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truth. This is an old truth that goes back hundreds of years to the time of Solomon. The remedy for their weakened hearts was to hear the truth again. The cause of much of our spiritual weakness, by the way, is that we forget biblical truth. That is the cause of much of our spiritual weakness. We despair, we despise God's discipline, we slip into sin. We become spiritually weak. We become spiritually and emotionally anemic. We get frustrated under the disciplines and afflictions of this life because we forget biblical truth. And so the author here simply says to them, oh, you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons.

Now, let's be clear. The Hebrew Christians had not forgotten Proverbs chapter 3. They knew it intellectually, right? Many of those Hebrews to whom the author is writing could have quoted that passage from memory, just as the author of this passage quotes it from memory. So it is not that they forgot it in the sense that, "Oh, that's right, yeah, God disciplines His people. I totally—I don't know where that was at. I just forgot it." No, they had it in their head, but they had forgotten it in the sense that their understanding of God's discipline was no longer informing their affections and their wills and their hearts and their choices. It was no longer informing their emotions. So now, under the hand of God, under that discipline, their emotions were getting away from them. They were becoming faint because they had forgotten, emotionally, that biblical truth, even though they may have known it mentally.

Let me give you an illustration: somebody who struggles with anxiety over future events or future decisions, and they are worried, and they are anxious, and they are up late at night, lacking sleep, and they're up early in the morning, and they're just churning over that all the time—anybody here been anxious over the future in some way? Right, the anxious person. What is the answer for the anxious person? It's to come to the anxious person and say, "Look, at this moment, you are forgetting the sovereignty of God." They're not forgetting it in the sense that, "Oh yeah, I forgot God is sovereign." They know God is sovereign. It's not like they would say, "I was going through the attributes of God today—omniscience, omnipresence, transcendence, and immanence, and all these. I forgot sovereignty. It just never occurred to me that God is sovereign." It's not that mentally that person doesn't understand that God is sovereign. It's that in that moment the sovereignty of God is not being put into that situation, into their heart, so that it may mortify the sin of anxiety. You've forgotten the sovereignty of God.

When the truth that we know intellectually is not affecting our heart and our soul and our lives in a practical way, then we can legitimately be said to have forgotten it, biblically speaking. When the truth that we know intellectually, that is given in Scripture, that we have learned, that we have heard, that we know, when that is not informing my heart and my mind and my will in that moment, we can be biblically said to have forgotten that truth. Because remembering that truth means that I bring that truth to bear on my heart.

So if forgetting biblical truth is the cause of spiritual weakness, then what is the answer? The answer to it is to remind ourselves of the truth so that the truth may inform our hearts and our minds and our will and our affections. That's the answer to it. To speak truth to my heart. So when my heart rebels against what is true and it wants to sin and it wants to do its own thing, I, Jim Osman, need to take the truth of Scripture and inform my heart of what is true. I need to speak to my heart, to my situation, and make my heart comply itself to that truth. By the power of the Holy Spirit, I can do that. You can do that. So if my problem is that I have forgotten something, then the answer to that is that I need to remind my heart of what is true and make my heart, my will, my emotions, my desires, my affections, my thinking, and thus my course of life—because as a man thinks in his heart, so is he—make those comply with what is written in Scripture. Speak truth to ourselves lest we forget it. That's the answer.

Now, I want you to notice one more thing before we talk about being sons and sonship. I want you to notice one more thing. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this. I want you to notice how the author speaks of what is addressed to them as sons in the Old Testament. Look at the beginning of verse 5. Again, “You have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons.” Then he quotes Proverbs chapter 3. There is a tendency within Christianity today, particularly since we are new covenant believers, to think that anything that was written to old covenant believers was for them and that the New Testament is for us. Andy Stanley has this whole thing where he wants to unhitch Christianity from the Old Testament. He's working feverishly to unhitch Christianity from the New Testament as well. But his whole idea here is that the stuff under the old covenant, that was for them, and this is for us. But notice what this author in Hebrews gives to his audience, new covenant believers, as a source for their fainting and discouraged hearts: truth from the old covenant.

By the way, is this your view of the Old Testament? When you read the book of Proverbs, do you believe that it is addressed to you as sons? Because I think that that is something that is true not just of the Proverbs, and not just of Proverbs 3, verses 11–12. That is something that is true of the entire Old Testament. It is addressed to you as sons. There was a fantastic observation that was made by Dan Phillips when he was here for our Cessationist Conference. He said that the infinite mind of God—when God does one thing, He does that one thing as if it's the only thing that He's doing, even though He is doing everything else. And in the infinite mind of God, God could be giving Scripture through, say, Solomon to his son, and at the same time, that infinite God with His infinite mind is addressing that same passage to you who will live thousands of years later. So that everything that is written, is written and addressed to me. That makes all of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation personal. It's not just that it was written to the Philippians, or to the Colossians, or to the Israelites of Isaiah's day, but rather that those things were addressed to us as His children. So if you think that you need a fresh revelation from God, something spoken today, something relevant for you, something fresh, hot off the press, you have a pathetically low view of Scripture. This book is

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addressed to you as sons. So when you read it, you are reading God's Word to you, just as if you were the only believer who had ever received this revelation. That is the author's view of Scripture.

Now, let's look at our status as sons. I want to camp on this for a bit, because this is the repeated refrain throughout the entire passage in this issue of discipline and properly understanding it. We need to interpret everything that is in this passage in terms of this father-son relationship that we have with God, who is our Father. There is a designation here, in fact a couple of contrasts, in this reference to us as sons that the author intends.

First, there is the contrast here between the status that you and I now enjoy as sons and the status that we once had as God's enemies. So Scripture describes you and I as sons of God or daughters of God. And by the way, just because we live in a crazy world and I have to say this lest I be misunderstood, when I say "sons" all the way through this, we're talking about sons and daughters. I'm using "sons" in the commonsense way that we've used it up until about five minutes ago when the world lost its mind and can't figure out what a gender is anymore, OK? So when I talk about sons, this is not sexism. It's not the patriarchy coming out in me, OK? The patriarchy comes out in me in other places. I don't need it to come out here. So "sons" is sons and daughters, all the children of God, but I'm just going to use "sons" as shorthand.

This describes something that is true of us now that was not true of us before we were saved and redeemed by God's grace. Once we were aliens and strangers. Once we were enemies of God. We were without life. We were cut off from the life of God, and we were under His wrath. But by the work of Christ and the grace of the Father, the Father has brought us near to Himself. Don't forget that. We once were aliens and strangers, and we have been brought near. And now He has adopted us into His family and welcomed us as His children. And listen, He did not do this unwillingly. You and I didn't sneak into the family unawares. He didn't wake up one day and say, "Hey, who's the new kid at My table? I've never seen him before." That is not the way that our God works. Rather, our God sought us out. He chose us in eternity past before He created a single atom or an angel or spoke anything into existence. He elected or chose in His Son all whom He would redeem.

So He chose you as His child, if you're in Christ Jesus, before He ever created a single thing. And then He took that gift, that chosen humanity, and He gave it to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And then He sent His Son into the world so that He could live a perfect life, a perfectly righteous life, fulfill all of the Old Testament demands of His law and His moral law, and to fulfill all of that in the place of His people, on behalf of those people whom He has chosen. And then the Son was to die a sacrificial, substitutionary, voluntary death on the cross, so that He might bear all of the wrath of those whom the Father chose and gave to the Son. And then the Son calls and gathers out of humanity

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over the course of time all those whom the Father chose and all those whom the Father gave to Him. He draws them to Himself, calls them by name, saves them, gives eternal life to them, promises them their security and ultimate glorification, and then works in their life all the way through time and brings them finally into His presence. And Jesus said He rejects or refuses none of those whom the Father has given to Him. And the Spirit regenerates those people. And then God the Father credits to those people, whom the Son lived for and died for, all of the Son's righteousness, credits it all to their account and takes all of the sin of that mass of humanity and imputes it to His Son, upon whose head all of the wrath of the Divine Being is poured out for our sin. And then He gives to us an eternal and infinite inheritance because He has adopted us as His sons, and gives us a seat at His table.

You and I didn't become God's children willy-nilly. We didn't step into the family unawares to the Father. This was *His* choice. All of that was *His* doing. And so now we have full and complete adoption into the family of God so that everything that belongs to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, belongs to you and belongs to me, and we share it together for all of eternity. He takes His enemies and He makes them His redeemed children, gives them the inheritance and the blessings and the glory of His infinite Heaven. That is incredible.

And you are a child, by the way, not in the sense like the redheaded stepchild who's really not one of the family, kind of off to the side—you're one of the family, but you're not one of the family. So you're kind of welcomed, you're there, but you're always sort of on the outskirts of it. You're different than everybody else. Everybody else is the real sons, but yeah, you're technically a son. You're involved in the family chat, but you're not in the family chat. You know what I mean? Not that kind of a son. Not at all. Full status, no qualifiers at all. No qualifiers. You're as much a child of God as the apostle Paul was and the apostle John was. The disciple whom Jesus loved, you share the same status as that one. That's unbelievable. That is the mindset with which we must evaluate God's discipline.

There's a contrast here also between God's people and unbelievers. He does not deal with us as He deals with unbelievers. God doesn't discipline unbelievers. That is a blessing He has reserved for you and I. He doesn't discipline unbelievers. He will leave them in their sin. He doesn't correct them in their sin. He leaves them in their sin. That is judgment. That is wrath. That is abandonment. That is damnation. The correction for sin, that is a blessing that is reserved only for family members. Unbelievers don't get this. They get punishment. They don't receive His love, they get His wrath. They aren't corrected in their sin, they're abandoned to it. They aren't trained, they're judged. Discipline is for us. Thank God for that. You get discipline. Would you rather not have discipline? If you don't get discipline, you get wrath. Those are the two options. Those are the two ways that God deals with people. Either He deals with them as sons in discipline, or He deals with them as enemies in His wrath. Those are the two ways that

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God deals with mankind. And if you are in His Son, then you get His love and not His wrath. That distinction helps us to understand what discipline is and why we should embrace it.

And with that framework in mind that we are sons, now let's define a little bit from our context what discipline is. We'll define discipline, then we'll kind of work through some scenarios. [*Looks at the clock*] Never mind, we're not going to work through some scenarios. I'm going to define discipline, give you three principles here in just a moment. First, the word *discipline* here, it is found in our passage, verses 4–11, in both its noun form as well as its verb form. It comes from the word *pais*, which is a reference to “child.” According to one commentator, the word is a broad term, signifying whatever parents and teachers do to train, correct, cultivate, and educate children to help them develop and mature as they ought. That word, some form of it, verb or noun, is used nine times in these eight verses. This word can be translated as, listen carefully, “punishment”—doesn't mean punishment in our context. It can be translated as punishment, as chastisement or correction, training, education, or instruction. It can be a word that is painful, and it can be a word that is pleasant. It can be a word that's painful and a word that is not painful. It can refer to education or instruction, intellectual training or discipleship or discipline. It can refer to the emotional forming or shaping of a child. It is a very broad word.

Now, I think that the author has in mind in our context the kind of discipline that is not necessarily pleasant. For instance, you can discipline your child by rewarding them for something that they've done that is good, for good behavior. That is a form of discipline. It is moral training and education and instruction. That's pleasant discipline. But then there's also unpleasant discipline. Now, which is it that you think causes the Christian to lose heart and almost despair, the pleasant discipline or the unpleasant discipline? It's the unpleasant discipline. None of us have said, “I just don't think I can handle any more blessings. I just don't think I can handle any more pleasures in this life. This life is just everything I'd ever want. This is Heaven on earth. I can't take any more.” None of us have ever said that. But we have been under the chastening hand of God, the unpleasant kind of discipline, and thought to ourselves, “I don't know if I can take any more of this”—in all seriousness. Hebrews 12, verse 11: “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful.” That's the kind of discipline the author has in mind, a chastening that is uncomfortable, unpleasant, and possibly even painful.

Now for many of us, when we think about the act of God's discipline, this instruction and training that He does for those who are His, considering that raises more questions for us than Hebrews 12 answers. And I want to be honest with this right at the front of our little talks here on Hebrews 12. This issue raises for us more questions than Hebrews 12 answers. Let me give you some examples. How often should I expect discipline? Once a week? Once a month? Once a year? Twice a year? How long is that discipline supposed to last? How severe will it get? What form will it take? Which sins in

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my life bring discipline and which ones does the Lord let slide maybe for a period of time but then later on He does something about it? And how long will He let them slide before He will do something about those sins?

What am I to learn when under discipline? What is the specific lesson that I am to learn? How does my discipline affect those around me? Do my children suffer when I am disciplined? If the Lord disciplines my children, will I suffer when He's disciplining them? And here's where it gets even more complicated. What if the Lord disciplines my spouse? How does that affect me, and how does that affect the children? And how does that affect everyone else in the church and our family?

Is all difficulty in this life discipline or are there difficulties in this life that are not discipline, that are just the results of me being stupid, doing something foolish, making a dumb mistake? And how do I know the difference? Can I be underneath of affliction in this life, suffering, and say, "Well, this isn't discipline. No, this is just so-and-so doing something stupid. This has nothing to do with the discipline of God"? And is there some connection between sin and the discipline that I endure? Is there a one-to-one correspondence between these two things? Can I always know in the midst of affliction that this is connected to this specific sin, and because I did this sin, I'm now enduring this difficulty? Can I know that all of the time? And here's another question. If I can't know that, then am I justified in saying that whatever difficulties or sufferings or afflictions I'm going through have nothing at all to do with my sin? Is that a right conclusion to make? Is all discipline painful? And how do I know if I'm experiencing God's discipline or just living in a horrible world?

I wish there were some algorithm that we could plug all of the various factors into and come up with an answer to many or all of those questions. I wish there were. I wish there were some flowchart given in Scripture—are you experiencing this, this, this, this, or this? Right. OK, I'm this. I'm over here, number three. OK, did you sin last week? Yes or no? Yes. OK, over here. This is it. Was the sin grievous? Yes or no? Yes. OK, you're down here. But there is no such algorithm. There's no such formula. The secret things belong to the Lord our God. He does not reveal these things to us. He does not tell us all that He is doing through all of the things that we endure as individuals, as families, as couples, and as a church. He doesn't reveal those things.

But instead what Hebrews 12 does tell us is that suffering and affliction are connected in some way to sin, though not necessarily to a specific sin. Sometimes God may be working to purge me of sin that I don't even know is there and has not even had a chance to manifest itself yet in some grievous way. But instead He is disciplining me because He knows that if He doesn't, that that sin that is in there, that resides in me, will blossom and flourish at some point in the future, and without that discipline in my life at this moment, in this severity, at this time, that sin will destroy me or destroy somebody else. He doesn't need to reveal all of that because in the secret providential

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counsels of His mind and in the working out of His will amongst His people, He is the only one that needs to know what He is doing in everybody's life. But He does instruct us on how to respond to these things.

See, so the temptation as we talk about discipline—and we're not talking about church discipline, by the way. That's an entirely different subject. We're not talking about church discipline. As we're talking about discipline, there will be times when you might be tempted to come up and ask me and say, "Jim, what sin is it that I have committed that has brought this upon me, and what am I supposed to be learning at this time?" Those are the wrong questions to be asking. They're the questions we want to ask, but they're the wrong questions to be asking. The right question to be asking is "How can I respond in humble submission to what God is doing through this event?" That's the question I need to ask. How can I embrace this and learn from it and pursue holiness and pursue God in the midst of this trial? That's the question we need to ask, and not be concerned with how do I get out from underneath of it, but how do I learn what God wants me to learn in the midst of it?

So let's put some foundational truths in place as we think about discipline. I have a three-point outline for you this morning, and here are the three points. And we will get through all three of these. First of all, we talked about this last week, discipline is not a punishment. It is correction. It's not punishment, it's correction. Discipline is correction, not punishment. It's not punitive. God's discipline is not punitive. How do I know that? Because of the cross. That's how I know. All my sin was laid upon Him, all the wrath for it was borne in full. There's nothing left to pay. When Jesus said, "It is finished," He wasn't saying, "It's finished except for all the stuff that I'm going to pour out on the heads of My people throughout the course of their lives." It didn't mean that. It's finished. If the price has been paid, then there is no longer any condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

A Christian can never say that their suffering or their affliction in this life is a punishment for their sin. In fact, I would submit to you that that is a blasphemous slander against the character of God for you to say that. You can never say the afflictions of this world are intended as a punishment for my sin, and that I now am making atonement for my sin. Never, if you are in Jesus Christ, because God has poured out upon His Son the full wrath for every sin you have ever committed. The only way you can be a child of God is if all of your sins have been paid for and the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to your account, so that you stand in the sight of God, not just as a sinner who has been forgiven, but a sinner who has been declared righteous, so that God sees you through the righteousness of His Son. Therefore, He can never be displeased with you in the sense of wanting to pour out His wrath or His anger upon you for your sin.

So a Christian can never say that my suffering and my affliction is a punishment, that I'm paying for my sins or atoning for my sins. That can only be said if somebody is outside of

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Jesus Christ. But if you're in Christ, there's no condemnation for you. The payment has been paid in full. That's not to say that affliction and discipline are not connected to sin. They certainly are. But it is to say that discipline is not punishment, atonement, or payment for sin. That has already been paid for. You have to understand the difference between those two things. There's a difference between disciplining your child to make them pay for something they have done and disciplining your child out of love to correct them so that they don't do what they did again. Those are two vastly different approaches to disciplining children. It is two vastly different understandings of what God is doing in the process of disciplining us.

You may sometimes experience difficulties because of your sin as a direct consequence of a sin that you have committed. There may not at times be a connection obvious to you between some indwelling sin and discipline that you're going through. You don't necessarily need to be able to make that connection in order to benefit from the discipline. You need to be open to what God might be doing. Sometimes we suffer the consequences of our sin and we reap what it is that we sow. That's true. And there are connections between what we do and what happens as a result of what we do, and we need to be able to make those connections when they are obvious.

But if I say that I am being punished for my sin, that I am paying for my sins in this world, that is a slander against God's justice. If God has poured out all the wrath for my sin upon His Son, it is unjust for God to punish me for those same sins. It's unjust. Therefore, to say that God is punishing me for my sin is a slander against His justice. And it's a slander against His righteousness because if I'm in Christ, then He has clothed me with His righteousness, and all of the perfectly righteous life of Jesus Christ is credited to my account. And therefore God is not going to punish me, a righteous one—and not righteous because of my conduct, but righteous because of my standing—He's not going to punish me, a righteous one, for sins that I have done. It would be a slander against His righteousness. And it would be a slander against His love. If God in love has poured out all of my sin upon His Son, for me to say that that love is somehow deficient, that now He is going to exact, in love, the same punishment for me, that's a slander against His love. And I think that if we went down through the character qualities of God, we could probably find a way in which that statement—God is punishing me for my sin—is a slander against half a dozen or a dozen of His attributes (His holiness, His righteousness, His justice, His wisdom, His love). And so we could never, as Christians, say this chastisement, discipline, is a result of or a punishment for my sin.

Now, to the unbeliever who might be listening to me, I can offer you no such comfort. None whatsoever, because Scripture says at this very moment you are under the wrath of God, so that any affliction, any suffering, any misery that you are in in this life is only a harbinger of what is to come if you will not repent and trust Christ for salvation. If you have not been born again and you have not come to understand the depth of your sin and seek the only remedy that God offers, and that is in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ—

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if you have not done that, then I promise you, if you leave this world impenitent, unredeemed, and not having your sins atoned for, you will wish that you could be back on this earth living your worst day over and over and over again *Groundhog Day*-style for all of eternity. Because what awaits you is worse than anything you have experienced in this life, because you are under the wrath of God even now. And the worst affliction in this world doesn't hold a candle to what is to come for you.

You want to avoid that? You want to avoid the wrath of God? Scripture offers you one remedy, and it is in Christ Himself who bore the wrath for all who will repent and believe. Turn from your sin, call out to God for mercy, repent, and trust in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who bore the wrath for all sinners who believe in Him. You do that, you will find that He will forgive your sin, give you the righteousness of His Son, and take you to Heaven to be with Him.

So, first, discipline is correction, not punishment. Second, the motive for discipline is love and not anger. It's love and not anger. God deals with us as with sons. Verse 6: "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines." Don't miss that. "Those whom the Lord loves He disciplines." It is love that is behind what we think is His displeasure with us or His anger toward us. The discipline of God seems like anger when it comes at us, but it is not anger. It is love that is behind that. As William Cowper said, it is a smiling face that is behind the cloud of God's providence. What strikes us as God's anger with us is not anger at all. It is His love. That is what is behind His discipline. The familial love that God has for His own means that He applies the perfect measure of discipline, the perfect amount of discipline, the perfect time of discipline to His people to accomplish His purposes, which is our good.

"Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him" (Prov. 22:15). Right? Christian parent, you've quoted that a hundred times if you've quoted it once. Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, and the rod will drive it far from him. Folly is also bound up in the heart of the child of God, and the rod of God's discipline will drive it far from him. Be thankful for it. I've told my kids a number of times, you should be thankful that I disciplined you. I think they are.

Psalms 119:67 says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word." Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now, after being afflicted, I keep Your word. Psalm 119:71: "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes." Obedience is our highest good. Growth in holiness is our highest good. And God will move Heaven and earth to accomplish those ends because He loves us just that much.

Charles Spurgeon said this, "When he afflicts his child [speaking of God], chastisement is applied in love, his strokes are, all of them, put there by the hand of love. The rod has been baptized in deep affection before it is laid on the believer's back. God doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve us for nought, but out of love and affection, because he perceives that if he leaves us unchastised, we shall bring upon ourselves misery ten

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thousand-fold greater than we shall suffer by his slight rebukes, and the gentle blows of his hand.”

Did you hear that sentence? The rod has been baptized in deep affection before it is laid to the believer's back. There's a quote of Spurgeon's that we like to embroider on pillows and put on calendars and on chalkboards, right? “The sovereignty of God is the pillow on which we lay our head at night.” You've heard that quotation? This is one you should stencil on a pillow: “The rod has been baptized in deep affection before it is laid to the back of the believer.” In other words, God does not just grab His rod and start coming after us. Instead, it is all motivated by love, a love that we cannot plumb or understand or even begin to grasp in this life. That's the infinite love of God. But that is what informs His discipline. It is for correction, not punishment. The motive is love and not anger or wrath.

And third, it is for our good and not our harm. God intends for us good. Look at verse 10, chapter 12. “For they [that is, earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good [and what is the good?], so that we may share His holiness.” That's the good. That we get to share His holiness. Every blow of the rod is for our good because He has in His mind our benefit and the kind intention of His will toward us. His goal is that you and I would fix our eyes on Jesus, that we lay aside every encumbrance and the sin that so easily entangles us, and that we would run the race that is set before us with endurance, looking to Him and considering Him who endured such hostility against Himself. That's the command.

How does God accomplish that in our lives? He makes us able to do that. He strengthens us for that task through discipline. This is another difference between discipline and punishment, by the way. Discipline is for the good of the person who is being disciplined. Punishment is for the satisfaction of the one who is meting out the punishment. That's a key difference. As a parent, if you're disciplining your child and you're spanking them because you want to satisfy your anger, your wrath in you, to pour out on them so that you can be happy again, you have missed the whole point of discipline. The point of discipline is to correct the one whom you love. It is for their good, not the satisfaction of something in you. When God punishes the unbeliever, He is satisfying something in Him, namely His demand for justice and righteousness against sin, pouring out His wrath against sin. There is something that's being satisfied there, not for the person who is receiving the punishment, but in the One who is doing the punishing.

But in discipline, it's the opposite. In discipline, it is motivated out of love. And it is for the good of the one who is being disciplined, not to satisfy something in the person who is meting out the discipline. God doesn't need to satisfy anything in Himself by disciplining us. He's doing something for our good. Now, He will end up being glorified for it, but He's doing something for our good. He is taking away sin. He is killing it. He is

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purging it from within us—indwelling sin and corruption—so that we may have more of grace, and more of Him, and more intimacy, and more love, and walk in more holiness. Like a surgeon must take a knife and yes, it's painful, he must cut cancer out of the body and remove it, so God, through discipline, does the same thing in the lives of His children with indwelling sin. Matthew Henry said, “Sin is the worst enemy both to God and man.” So then, if sin is a threat, if sin threatens my ruin and your ruin, if sin strangles our holy affections and ruins our witness and threatens our holiness and threatens our marriage and threatens our kids and threatens our family and threatens our church, then we ought to embrace it, if God will do what is necessary. And that is to painfully cut that out of our lives.

Why does He do this? So that we may share His holiness. You and I have to remember two things if we're going to embrace discipline: that the afflictions that we endure are not as bad as we deserve and, second, God disciplines us as sons, not as enemies. Knowing that distinction, knowing those truths, helps us to view discipline as we should and to embrace it as from the hand of God, for His glory and for our good and for the good of those around us in our own community of faith.