

## Don't Despise Discipline (Hebrews 12:5)

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 REPROVED 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)

The wisdom of God is seen in the variety of ways that He corrects us and trains us and equips us and prepares us for life and service in this world and for obedience in this life. And our God wastes nothing. I think it was the second song that we sang there in the first set: "Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might" (Smith, "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise"). God does not want or waste anything in the lives of His children. No difficulty, no disappointment, no disaster is without a purpose. Nothing comes to you except by divine appointment. The sovereign God who upholds all things by the word of His power and rules all of His creation, holding all of it together, He does not struggle to accomplish His purposes in our lives. And He uses every last thing that comes into our lives in some way for His purposes, to accomplish those purposes in us, to produce in us

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obedience, to produce in us holiness, to conform us and form us to the image of Christ, because to that end we have been predestined—to be conformed to the image of His Son, as Romans 8 says. And so everything in our lives is used by God for that purpose in some way. All of it together works together for our good and for His glory in molding us and shaping us into that image so that, in the language of Hebrews chapter 12, we may share His holiness and we may demonstrate or manifest the peaceful fruits of righteousness.

And we will see all of God's purpose for us eventually in Heaven. What is a mystery to us here will be a beauty to us there. For then we will see everything that He has been doing through every event and every circumstance and every disappointment and every discouragement and every affliction that has come into our lives.

Everything is a tool in His hand. Persecution, personal tragedy, dashed hopes, betrayals, natural disasters, man-made afflictions and sufferings, tribulations, reproaches, imprisonment, hostility from the world, loss, financial destruction, the death of a loved one, physical disability, sickness, and sufferings—all of them are in the hand of God. All of them are used by Him. They are tools in His hand to mold us and to shape us. It is by faith that we embrace that and that we love that and that we trust that—that in eternity, we will look back and realize nothing has been wasted. We will never get to Heaven and say, of all the things that happened to me, I see the purpose behind all of these, but these half a dozen things in this decade of time here, this seems to be wasted. There was nothing accomplished by that. I can't see the end of it. I can't see the purpose for it. That will not happen when we get to glory. When we get to glory, we'll look back and see His sovereign hand appointing and ordaining every single thing that has happened to us. And we will see that it has been for our good and for His glory and for the good of others. And we will rejoice in that. We will remember and rejoice in the fact that He works all things after the counsel of His will.

Ephesians chapter 1 [verse 11] says we have been predestined to an inheritance “according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.” All things. Romans chapter 8, verse 28: “We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

If you're in Christ Jesus, you are called according to His purpose, and you love God, and God loves you. And therefore the promise stands that God causes all things to work together for good. It's not that everything that happens to us is a good thing, in and of

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itself, but that everything that happens to us is added to this script, this drama, and together they all work out for our good.

And if we could see the end from the beginning, as we will someday when we're at the end, looking back on the beginning, we will look back on everything and say, "I would not have changed anything." That is hard to wrap our minds around. It's even harder to wrap our hearts around. "I would not change anything. I would let God do exactly what He has done through all of those things." By faith we count that as so, and by faith we persevere in a hope that we know will not disappoint.

So far in Hebrews chapter 12, we have dealt with the mindset with which we embrace God's discipline, understanding that the afflictions that we endure are less than we deserve, and understanding that He deals with us as with sons. He disciplines His sons, not His enemies. We have been dealing for the last three weeks with the mindset with which we are to embrace God's discipline. Once we frame it properly and we remember that it's correction and it's not punishment, it's out of love and not out of wrath, and it is for our good and not for our harm, once we have that framework in mind, and we say, "OK, all of the afflictions that God has ordained and appointed for us in this life, they fit into that box. That describes all of those. All of it is for our good, not our harm. None of it is out of His wrath. All of it is ordained by Him for us out of love. And none of it is intended as a punishment on us for our sin, but rather it is intended as a correction for us, so that He might preserve us from sin and purge us from sin"—once we have framed that, which I think we have adequately done to this point, now we can move on to the manner in which we embrace God's discipline.

So we talked about the mindset with which we embrace God's discipline, and now we're going to talk about the manner of it in verse 5. We're focusing in on the quotation in verse 5. "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM." That describes the manner with which we approach and embrace God's discipline.

How do we do this? And I'm not specifically talking about the mechanics of how we do it, like, "What do I do today, tomorrow, and the next day? What things do I do, physically speaking?" but rather the attitude with which we embrace God's discipline. How do I do this in my spiritual life? It's one thing to have it properly framed in my head as to what this is. And now, how is it that I go about embracing this?

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And again, discipline is not a joyful thing, in and of itself. The author is honest about that. Down in verse 11: “all discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful.” So when we embrace God’s discipline, the point of embracing it is not to convince ourselves that it’s fun. “Oh, I lost my spouse. I have to find how this is fun.” Unless you just lost her at the mall, then that might be fun. You can go find her. But if you lost her like she died, then the point of embracing discipline or difficulty and affliction in your life is not to convince yourself that this is enjoyable. There's nothing about sitting next to the bedside of a loved one who is suffering a terminal illness or dying of a terminal illness—there's nothing about that that is enjoyable or fun. But it’s fruitful in an eternal sense. It’s fruitful, it’s not fun. And the goal is not to convince ourselves that it’s fun. The goal is not to convince ourselves that it’s joyful or to find some joy in it, because the author is honest—all discipline, all afflictions, trials, tribulations, all of it seems in the moment not to be joyful, but sorrowful. That’s true. We can weep. It’s OK to weep. Yet to those who have been trained by it, there is fruit in it. It produces the peaceful fruits of righteousness. It produces something that is joyful and will bring joy.

So let’s jump in now at verse 5. You’ll notice if you’re reading the NASB that the end of verse 5 and verse 6 are in all caps. That indicates to us that it is a quotation from the Old Testament.

Let’s read those two verses together.

5 “MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;

6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.”

That is a quotation from Proverbs chapter 3, verses 11 and 12. And the wording is a little bit different in the New Testament quotation of that than it is back in the book of Proverbs chapter 3. You don’t need to turn there, but I’m going to read to you now Proverbs 3:11–12. And I just want you to notice the words that are different, how it is phrased differently. Just pay attention to it with your eyes on Hebrews 12, verses 5 and 6.

Here's Proverbs chapter 3, verses 11 and 12:

11 My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD or loathe His reproof,

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12 for whom the LORD loves He reproveth, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.

Now, the wording is a little bit different, but the meaning is not. And what is it that accounts for the difference of wording? If this is a quotation, how come it's not a direct quotation or a word-for-word quotation? Well, it actually is a word-for-word quotation if you were holding in your lap the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament that Jesus and the apostles would have had in their day. This is the translation of the Scriptures with which the author of Hebrews would have been familiar. He would have been able to cite large passages of it from memory, and that's what he does here, quoting Proverbs chapter 3 in the Septuagint translation, which is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Then we in our English translation, translate from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

Now, there are people who say that the Bible is nothing but a translation of a translation of a translation of a translation over time, and that its meaning has been lost and the original reading is unrecoverable. That's not true. The furthest we get away from the Hebrew Old Testament is an English translation of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. But we can still go back to the Hebrew Old Testament and compare Proverbs chapter 3 and realize that the author here, though he is quoting a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, the meaning is the same.

And this is what we typically get in the New Testament. When we are reading quotations from the Old Testament, we are typically getting the Septuagint translation, because that's the translation that they would have been familiar with, and that accounts for the difference in wording. But as I said, the meaning is not different at all. The essence or the sense of it is the same.

Verse 5 addresses the manner in which you and I are to respond to God's discipline. And it warns us of two opposite errors, either to despise God's discipline—that's the first phrase: "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord." And the second error is to faint under God's discipline: "nor faint when you are reproveth by Him." Those are our two errors. We despise God's discipline or we just despair underneath of it.

These are two opposite errors. They are actually on two opposite extremes of our response to God's discipline. The one when we despise God's discipline, that ends up hardening the heart as a response. When we look down upon the discipline of God, the result of that is that our heart is hardened against the work that God is doing in our

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hearts. On the opposite side of that, when we despair under God's discipline, we actually lose heart. And that's what the idea of fainting here carries; it carries the idea of our hearts just weakening out and losing heart under them. We give up, we despair under it. So one results in a hard heart, the other results in a weak heart. To despise God's discipline is to think of discipline as nothing; it's to disdain it. Whereas to faint under His discipline is to think of it as everything and to say, "Oh, I cannot bear it."

Opposite errors. To despise it, look down upon it. To despair underneath of it is to think of it as being something that is so heavy, so over the top, that I cannot bear up underneath of it. One looks down and makes nothing of it. The other looks at it and makes everything out of it. Those are two opposite extremes. To despise His discipline is to regard it as too light a thing to consider properly. And to despair under it is to regard it as too heavy a thing to bear. One results in bitterness and hostility—that's despising God's discipline—results in bitterness and hostility. The second results in a brokenness and despair.

Neither of those are healthy. Neither of those is the object of discipline. The object of discipline is the peaceful fruit of righteousness, sharing in His holiness, pursuing sanctification, without which we cannot see God. And if we err in either one of these camps, we either end up hostile and bitter and angry over the things that God has ordained and appointed for us, or we end up despairing and weakened and fainting under it. And in neither of those cases is the purpose of God in that discipline accomplished in our lives. And so what we ought to do is to embrace His discipline and to pursue the holiness and not err in either of these two common ways that Christians respond to God's discipline.

So if we are to embrace God's discipline in the proper manner and how we ought to think of it, we ought not to think lightly of it or faint under it. We must not despise it or despair under it. And I think that once we consider the errors that typically we commit under either of these two headings, how it is that we respond to that discipline, particularly in the rest of the passage, will become quite evident.

So if we are to embrace God's discipline, we must not despise it. That's the first phrase of verse 5. Read it with me again. "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord." That word *regard lightly* is used only one time in the New Testament. It's translated here. It's used nowhere else. You might think that this just has to do with kind of not valuing it enough, but it's more than that. There are many ways that we show our despising of God's discipline. The definition of this word—it means to look

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down on, to think lightly or regard lightly, as it's translated in verse 5. It means to look down on or to have contempt for something. The idea of like an arrogant or prideful person might walk by a beggar on the street, kind of pass by it. You think little of it. You have very little regard for it—actually have contempt for it. It means to make light of something or to despise it, to esteem it very little, to have little regard for it or to care little for it.

Now, the phrase in Proverbs, back in Proverbs chapter 3, says, “Do not reject the discipline of the Lord.” We tend to reject those things that we value very little. If anybody offers you a diamond necklace, you don't reject that, do you? Why? Because you cherish it. You understand there's value in it. We reject the things that we esteem very lightly. We tend to turn those things away. That's why the author of Proverbs uses that word that means to reject something, to turn away from it. In Hebrews, we think lightly of it.

Let me give you four ways that we despise God's discipline. And each of these four ways that we despise God's discipline is going to be an opportunity for us to examine our own hearts and how we respond to afflictions, sufferings, difficulties, trials, tribulations, reproaches, hostility, persecution, all the stuff that comes into our lives, all the things that none of us like.

Number one, we complain about His discipline. We complain about it. And I put that right up at the top because I want to spend the most amount of time on the subject of complaining. If we could only understand the evil that is present in our own murmuring hearts, if we could only understand that, we would be horrified at how sinfully evil a complaint is against the good hand of God. And yet, when we experience something that is a tribulation or a trial, an affliction or suffering, some form of discipline in our lives, our most natural response is to complain about it.

We are complaining creatures. We complain about everything. You go to the restaurant this afternoon and you sit down at a table and you order a meal, you will be presented with a hundred opportunities to complain. The waitress is here too much. The waitress is not here enough. My glass is filled too often. My glass is not filled enough. My food is too hot. My food is not hot enough. If you complain about too hot food, there's something wrong with you, but most of us complain when our food is served to us cold. There's not enough here for the price. There's too much here for the price. The music is too loud. The music is not loud enough. The lighting is too bright. The lighting is not bright enough. I can't hear what's going on. The waitress is annoying. You will be

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presented with a hundred opportunities to complain. And we will probably naturally, instinctively, at least in our hearts and minds, take opportunity to complain about ninety out of the hundred things that are presented to us just over a meal, without ever coming face-to-face with the reality of what a tremendous blessing it is that God has provided something more for us to eat.

We are complaining creatures. We complain about everything. Afflictions and trials and sufferings and difficulties and persecutions certainly make that list. And the fact that we complain when we are undergoing discipline is the evidence that we need it. That's it. When you're experiencing discipline and your first instinct is to complain about it, stop right there and realize, this is the proof that this is what I need. And maybe this discipline is intended to purge me of the sin of complaining and produce in me gratitude and thankfulness.

Paul in Philippians chapter 2 says, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:14–15). Notice that the opposite of a wicked and perverse and crooked generation is a generation that does not complain or a group of people that does not complain. You are to do all things without grumbling or disputing. Does "all things" include enduring affliction and suffering and discipline and trials and tribulations? Would that be under "all things"? I'm tempted to think it would be included under "all things" since when Paul wrote that he was in prison for the sake of the gospel, and yet he is saying to us, "Do everything that you do without complaining."

This is our initial response in the midst of afflictions and tribulations. Our initial response to discipline is to say, "Lord, why have You saved me only to put me through this? Why me? Why can't my lot be different? Why won't You answer my prayer? Why won't You make this thing pass? Why do I have to go through this? Why me? Why now? Why this? Why them? Why us?" Complaining is a sin that is so ingrained in us that there's hardly one person among us that does not struggle to mortify and kill that sin. There's hardly a person here that is not tempted by it. I don't know that I've met anybody who never complains about anything.

You think the meal will present to you a hundred opportunities to complain? Don't even get me started on the weather. Every day is a whole series of things that we are offered to complain about. Too much snow, too little snow, too bright light, too cloudy, and on and on it goes. We breathe in oxygen and we exhale complaints. That is the nature of

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humanity. We breathe it in and we exhale complaints. Not carbon dioxide—complaints about everything. And the source of these complaints comes from a wrong assessment of the purpose of God in our discipline. We don't understand that what He is doing in us through the trials and the afflictions is something so precious, so golden, so perfect, and so eternal that if we could just see that, we wouldn't complain about it at all. We would embrace it readily. We have a heart that thinks too highly of itself and too little of God's wisdom. In the midst of our afflictions, we forget His purposes.

We're familiar with the many examples of the Israelites who, right after they get delivered out of a great tribulation or a trial, they come out—say, for instance, out of Exodus, out into the wilderness—what was the first thing that they did? “We don't like the water supply. We don't like the meat supply. We don't like the vegetable supply. We're not sure why we're out here doing this.” And what did they long for? To go back to the bondage of Egypt. And we read that story and we look at them and we say, how can they be so foolish? And then a third of a second's reflection tells us, that is me. I am them. I would do the exact same thing in that situation. I have done the exact same thing in that situation. We are delivered from the eternal wrath of God and the penalty for our sin. And then we complain about the freedom that we enjoy and we complain about not having enough of whatever it is that we desire. We're just like the children of Israel, delivered from His wrath and then we cry out, “Oh, if only I were back in Egypt. If only I had the leeks and the melons.” We escape the sword of God's wrath only to complain about the rod of His love.

If I have truly escaped God's wrath, His eternal wrath, then there is no aspect of discipline with which I should complain. If I realize that it comes from a loving hand and that I have not been appointed the sword of His anger and His wrath, but instead I've been spared that, and then He has taken the rod of His discipline and He has baptized it in deep affection before laying it to my back, as Spurgeon says, then how could we possibly respond to that with complaints?

We think little of His discipline, valuing it little, not seeing it as something that is worth cherishing, not looking at what it is that it is intended to produce in us, and we don't value that thing or cherish that thing. And what is the cure for this? It is to remember that the afflictions that we endure are less than we deserve, right? Verse 4, you have not yet shed blood in your striving against sin. It could be worse. You deserve worse. I deserve worse. Spurgeon said it this way: “Are not His strokes fewer than your crimes

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and lighter than your guilt?” That’s a good question. “Are not His strokes fewer than your crimes and lighter than your guilt?”

A. W. Pink said, “Remind yourself of how much dross there is yet among the gold, and view the corruption of your own heart and marvel that God has not smitten you more severely.” That’s the perspective change. That’s what we need to keep in mind, remembering that God is treating us as sons, not as enemies, and that every thought of His toward us is only good, it is only loving. It comes out of a deep and abiding affection that He has for His own people. And in the moment of complaint, the truth that we need to speak to our hearts is that this thing, however distasteful and sorrowful it is in the moment, is for my good. He intends it for my good, and He intends it for my eternal glory. That’s the truth I have to speak to my own heart in the midst of affliction when I am tempted to complain. If I could only see the end from the beginning, it would call forth my highest praise for Him for what He is doing in the midst of the affliction.

Now, let me offer a clarification because when I complain about people complaining, it can be easily misunderstood. We are tempted to hear somebody talk about not complaining in the midst of affliction and think that what that means is that I never talk about my own difficulties to another person. That’s not what I’m describing. I’m not describing that. I’m not talking about refraining from sharing an affliction or a suffering or a difficulty or a trial that you’re going through with a beloved brother and sister in Christ or somebody in a leadership position or a friend or a neighbor who can help you out and counsel you and give you advice. That’s not what we’re talking about. It is the attitude, the manner, the heart expression of that sharing that makes it a complaint and not a sharing of what I’m going through.

So, for instance, if I tell my wife, “My back is out for the third time this year and I’m in tremendous pain and this is difficult,” I can do that in a way that shares with her what I’m going through so that she understands why it is that I don’t jump up to help her with something in the moment or why I’m not doing dishes or whatever it is. I can share that with her in an attempt that she could sympathize with me and help me out and understand and expect less from me for the next week until my back is better. Or I can say to my wife, “My back is hurting again. I don’t know why the Lord does this. This is the third time this year. Doesn’t He know that I need to work? Doesn’t He know that I need to provide? Doesn’t He know that I hate this? Does He not understand how much pain I’m in?” You see, one is me sharing with somebody what I’m going through. The

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other is me complaining about what I'm going through. And the difference between that is the attitude of the heart.

So when you are in the midst of discipline, it is perfectly legitimate to find a brother or sister in Christ with whom you can share that burden. You can talk it through, you can express it, you can let them know what you're going through so they can pray for you, so they can counsel you, so they can comfort you, and so that they can help you. That is entirely legitimate.

The second way that we despise God's discipline—not only just complaining about discipline, but questioning the wisdom of His discipline. This is really a complaint of a different nature, but it more complains about the wisdom of God in appointing that difficulty for me. When we think to ourselves or say to ourselves or even say to the Lord, "Look, this trial has gone on too long. This trial is too severe. This trial is not accomplishing anything in my life. This trial is not bearing any fruit. This trial would be better if it were given to my brother over there, or my sister over there, or even the annoying neighbor across the fence. Anybody else would be better to receive this trial than me. And this trial should be shorter. This trial should be more useful. What good is this affliction? I can't see what the purpose of this is in this." All of those are merely complaints or expressions of a questioning of God's wisdom in what He has ordained or appointed for me in the midst of my affliction. I'm really questioning whether He is best suited to determine who it is that should determine and appoint my afflictions and to guide and direct the appointed course of my life. I'm questioning God's wisdom.

"This trial should have ended yesterday, or it should not have been given to me, or it should not be this severe, or it should be of a different nature." That is simply saying to God, "If I were on the throne, I would handle me differently." And of course you would. You're not on the throne. But to question God's wisdom in the midst of that trial concerning things that He has appointed for me is a slight, a blasphemous slight really, against Him. Or to suggest that somebody else should deserve this affliction and not me is to question His wisdom in giving the affliction to whom He would give it.

Why me? Why now? Why this? All of these question God's wisdom in it. And the result of questioning God's wisdom is the bitterness that I talked about a few moments ago. And here's why. Because when I am undergoing affliction or difficulty and I'm in the midst of that discipline, when I question God's wisdom in giving it to me, what I am really saying is that the fruit of what He is going to produce in this is not worth the squeeze of the discipline. And so, if that is the case, then I'm going to think in my mind

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concerning God that He has taken something that is very precious from me and He has given me something that is not very precious. And the result of that will be bitterness, because I will be angry with God for taking something from me and not adequately compensating me for what He has removed from my life. Whether that is comfort or convenience or ease or reputation or financial stability, whatever it is. He has taken something from me and He has not adequately compensated me for that. That is going to produce hostility and bitterness toward God.

And here is the cure for that. Remember the purpose of the discipline. He disciplines us for our good so that we may share His holiness. That, for the believer, is more precious than anything this world has to offer. It will yield for us the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Remember that the One who has called you to run this race is Himself strengthening you and disciplining you so that He will guarantee that you will cross the finish line and receive the reward. That's the goal. And when you understand the goal, then you will not question the wisdom of the coach who's calling the plays and calling you to run the race. You will see it as a wise bestowment of everything that He has appointed in my life for my good.

The third way that we despise God's discipline—we complain about it, we question the wisdom of His decisions, and third, we regard it as shameful or dishonorable. It's not uncommon for us to view it as a shameful thing when we are undergoing God's discipline. I think this is because we misunderstand what God's discipline is. When we are under affliction or we're going through a difficulty, we tend to try and convince ourselves that we are somehow unique, that nobody else goes through these things. It's just me, I'm going through this. And because everybody else in the congregation hasn't shared with me the difficulties that they're going through, I must be the only one that is struggling with this. I must be the only one that is going through this. And if I'm the only one that is going through this, then I'm the only one that deserves this or needs this. And if I'm the only one that needs this, then there must be something horrible in my life that is not in everybody else's life. And therefore, if I'm undergoing discipline or affliction, then I should probably be ashamed of that fact, that this is difficult, that I'm going through this affliction. We always convince ourselves that everybody else has it so good.

This is the mistake that Asaph made in Psalm 73. He looked at the wicked and he saw their wealth and he said, "They're fat"—not that being fat is bad, but what he meant by it was they have plenty to eat, and the righteous are starving. They die in comfort.

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They're not plagued in their conscience. They're not under the hand of God's affliction. All they do is jet around the world telling the rest of us what to eat and how to eat it and when to eat it and what we get to do with our free time and our free money. And the rest of us have to live under this oppressive affliction that these people impose upon us. So the righteous get all of the affliction, the wicked get all of the blessings. This is what we tend to typically convince ourselves is true. That's Psalm 73.

Until, by the way—and I'll spoil the end of the psalm—Asaph came to realize, no, it's the exact opposite. The wealth that God gives to the wicked is their judgment. This is an act of God's judgment upon them. He is lifting them up so that their fall will be greater, and He will destroy the wicked through what we think are their blessings. It's not blessings, it's just prosperity. We convince ourselves that if we're undergoing affliction, that it must be something wrong with us—and it might be something that we have done that has brought on a discipline. That is always possible. But it's also possible that God brings into your life something that is discipline because He knows that you are strong enough to bear that burden and to carry that weight and to glorify Him through it.

Would you look at some young couple who is struggling with a sick child and think to yourself, "What have they done, Lord, to deserve this? Who sinned, they or their parents?" Isn't that the mistake that they made in John chapter 9 with the man born blind? What did they assume? If somebody's going through a difficulty, it must be the result of sin. How many things could you look at in the life of the apostle Paul and say, "It must have been sin in Paul's life that caused all of these afflictions and difficulties"? No, maybe—is it just possible that God would give that affliction to the apostle Paul, that suffering to that man, because that man could bear it and thus display the glory of God through that affliction? That God's glory might be manifested in his weakness? Is that possible? That is exactly the purpose of the affliction. It is not because God hates us. God loves us. In the midst of that affliction, He is producing in us something of an eternal weight of glory.

So we show that we regard God's discipline as shameful when we see it in our own life and we think that somehow we should be ashamed of the difficulty or affliction that we're undergoing. And we also reveal that we see it as shameful when we see it in the lives of other people and think that they are under some sort of judgment for their sin. This is the same mistake that the natives on the island of Malta made when the apostle Paul was stranded there and he picked up the bundle of sticks to throw into the fire, and the fire warmed up the snake, and the snake came out and bit him on the hand, a

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poisonous snake. And the natives said, “Oh, this man must be a murderer, and this is the judgment of the gods upon him.” So they assumed that when a bad thing happens, it can be directly correlated to something evil that that person has done. And in this life, we can't always make that connection.

Sometimes bad things happen because of evil things that we do. That's true. Sometimes affliction, sometimes difficulty, and sometimes discipline is the result of a sin and I can make a one-to-one connection between those two things, but not always. In fact, I would suggest most of the time that is not the case. Sometimes we just endure affliction and discipline because that is what God has appointed for us out of His love so that He may strengthen us, so that we can run the race and share in His holiness. The difficulties and afflictions, the discipline, are an evidence of God's love, not an evidence of His abandonment.

The fourth way that we demonstrate that we despise God's discipline or regard it lightly is to make light of it—to make light of it. And this is actually an error that we make on the other side of the other three errors. And that is the error of gritting our teeth, bearing down, and saying, “Yeah, this might be God's discipline, but so what? I'll get through this. Everybody endures this. I'll just persevere to the end. This is no big deal. It's no big deal. I'm not going to worry about it. I'm not really concerned about anything. It's just getting on the other side of this. God might be doing something, but I don't care what that thing is. I just need to get through this right now in this moment.” And what that demonstrates is a certain level of pride, a certain amount of pride that refuses to consider the value of the outcome that God has ordained for that trial, for that discipline. Rather than looking at the end and saying, “There is a holiness that I am predestined to share, there is a sanctification that I am to pursue in the midst of this discipline, and there is a peaceful fruit of righteousness that the Lord is wanting to work in my life”—rather than seeing all of that, this prideful response just simply says, “Yeah, God might be doing something. I don't know what it is, and frankly, I don't even care what it is. I'm just going to bear down and get through this.”

That is a way of despising, looking down upon, and actually reproaching, not just God's ordination of what He has ordained in the afflictions, but also reproaching what it is that God is doing through those afflictions. It's a prideful response. And the cure for that is to simply remember the purpose of the discipline—verse 10: that we may share His holiness and that it produces in us the peaceful fruits of righteousness.

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So the first extreme that we tend to is to despise God's discipline. If you regard it as punishment, then you are despising it. If you think that God intends your harm, then you are despising it. And if you think it is anything but love, an expression of His love, then you are despising it. But if you are convinced that God's discipline is not punishment but correction, it is not out of anger but out of love, and it is not for our harm but for our good, then you will never complain about it, you will never question the wisdom that has ordained it, you will not regard it as shameful, and you will not make light of it, but you will embrace it. But if you doubt God's goodness and His love, then you will question His wisdom, and you will complain about it, and you will make light of it, and you will see it as a shameful and embarrassing thing that you are undergoing affliction.

So my counsel to you would be to see the value in what it is that God has ordained for you in this life. Cherish it as the evidence of His deep and abiding love for you. And remember, He has not given you the sword of His wrath, He has given you the rod of His love. We can embrace that. He has not abandoned you in your sin, but He loves us enough to correct us in it and to bring into our lives those things that will strengthen us to cast off every encumbrance and the sin that so easily entangles us, so that we may run our race and that we may finish it with joy.

Homer Kent, in his commentary on Hebrews, says this, "To treat lightly or to despise these circumstances that come into the believer's life is to display ignorance of God's means of ministering to His children." Close quote. "To treat lightly or to despise these circumstances that come into the believer's life is to display ignorance of God's means of ministering to His children." God ministers to us through the discipline and the affliction. And when we despise it, we demonstrate our ignorance of what God is doing in the midst of it.

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