

The Peaceful Product of God's Discipline, Part 1 (Hebrews 12:11)

Hebrews chapter 12. Today, we are back in Hebrews 12, and you will likely be relieved to find out that we are nearing the end of our study in God's discipline. In fact, the study in God's discipline may be itself discipline in your life as you're looking forward to the affliction being lifted and moving on to more important—or we should say more enjoyable—subjects later on.

Discipline is a difficult thing for us to grasp, to get our minds around, and we've been taking our time, or I should say I've been taking my time—you really have no choice in the matter—but I've been taking my time working through this so that we might think rightly and respond appropriately to God's hand in our lives. That our hearts and minds would be flooded with the truth about discipline so that when it comes—not if it comes, but when it comes—we would embrace it and cooperate with the Lord in the sense of responding rightly, that He would produce in us those things which He intends through the difficulties: the peaceful fruit of righteousness and being able to share in His holiness.

We are looking forward to an eternal reward. That is what we are seeking after, that is what we desire. And so, as the author says in chapter 10, verse 36, “You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.” And we want to endure, and we want to respond appropriately so that we can do the will of God in the midst of His afflictions and disciplines that He sends, and then we can receive, after that, the reward.

Back at the beginning of verse 4, I offered to you an outline that has sort of been our guiding framework as we've worked our way through the passage. There were four points. Unfortunately for you, there weren't just four sermons, but there were more than that. There have been four points. In verses 4 through 5, we looked at the proper perspective of discipline, and we saw there that discipline is a blessing that God reserves for His children. He does not give that to His enemies. He punishes His enemies, but He blesses His children with discipline, with afflictions. Discipline is from a heart of love and not from wrath. There is not a drop of God's wrath that is mixed in with His discipline in our lives, not a bit. It is all motivated by His fatherly and redeeming love. And we embrace discipline by not despising it, by not looking down upon it, and by not despairing under it. And those are really two opposite extremes. The one is to reject it and to hate it, and the other is to just lose heart underneath of the discipline. Then in verses 6 through 8 we looked at the proof of discipline. We saw that discipline is an

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evidence of God's fatherly love for us, and it is an evidence of our adoption into His family. Then in verses 9 and 10 we saw the purpose of discipline, which is our sanctification as God prepares us and molds us and shapes us so that we might share in His holiness and enjoy holiness of life.

And now we come to verse 11. And we're looking now at the product of discipline, that God produces in us the peaceful fruits of righteousness. Look at verse 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." Now, there are a number of contrasts in verse 11. There is the contrast between what discipline seems to be doing—that is, creating sorrow—and what it is actually doing, which is creating the peaceful fruit of righteousness. So there's the contrast between those two things. There is the contrast between how discipline affects us and how we experience it in the moment. No discipline seems joyful in the moment, in the present, but afterwards (that's the contrast)—afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

So there is the contrast between what it seems to be doing and what it is actually doing; between what it does in this moment or how we experience it in this moment and how we actually experience it in the time that is to come in the future, when it produces the fruit; and then there is the difference, of course, between how discipline feels to us and the fruit that we enjoy from it. And it's two totally different things. And the difference is between what is taking place in the moment and what takes place or what is enjoyed in the future. And these contrasts confront us with the necessity of embracing discipline by faith. We're not that far removed from Hebrews chapter 11, and we spent more than just a couple of weeks in Hebrews 11, looking at the definition of faith and all of the manifestations of faith in the heroes of old all the way through the Old Testament, beginning back even just after the sin of man outside the garden with Cain and Abel. We looked at all the expressions of—not all the expressions, but all the expressions in Hebrews 11 of faith and what it is and how it preserves and protects the child of God in the life that we live, through the difficulties and the afflictions, the trials and the tribulations that inevitably come into this life. And we looked at all of those examples of men and women of whom the world is not worthy, men and women who did not live for this life but lived for the next. And they looked forward to the life that is to come and did not judge the faithfulness of God to His promises based upon what seemed appropriate to them in the moment, but instead judged the faithfulness of God to His promises based upon the character of God. That He is trustworthy and that He will keep His word. So these are men and women who looked forward to the life that is to come.

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The author is calling us in chapter 12 to embrace discipline by faith and to face the trials and the afflictions with the same faith that preserved the men and women of old, to approach the difficulties and hostilities of this life with the same resolute trust in God and His promises as we look forward to afterwards when discipline yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness, and to not judge the character of God or His love for us or His purposes in terms of what seems to afflict us in the midst of the moment. So verse 11 is about anticipating the peaceful fruit of righteousness which is to come, which is, in fact, the forward-looking element of faith. And we don't assess the character of God by what seems to be striking us in the moment.

So Verse 11 is our text for this morning. We've noted a couple of the contrasts in the verse, and so we'll kind of approach the verse from that perspective, noting the contrast. So here would be our outline for this morning. Number one, we're going to notice the pain of discipline that is our present experience. Look at that. "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful." And then we'll notice the product of discipline, which is our future expectation: "Yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." There is the contrast between what we experience now and what we can anticipate for the future.

So let's look first at the pain of discipline that is our present experience. Verse 11: "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful." Now, I have to appreciate the author's bluntness. Right, after all of this talk about discipline, he just comes right out and says to us something that we've probably been longing to hear since verse 4, and that is that all discipline seems not to be joyful in the moment, but sorrowful. This is how we experience discipline. We don't experience discipline as something that we enjoy. We experience discipline as something that causes us deep sorrow. Discipline is not joyful, it's sorrowful. It's sorrowful in the moment. It's sorrowful for the whole time that we're going through discipline.

In fact, discipline is not intended to be joyful. This is why I appreciate the author's bluntness. How much discipline is joyful? "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful." So not *some* discipline is sorrowful, not *most* discipline is sorrowful. But how much? All discipline in the moment seems not to be joyful, but instead sorrowful. This, in fact, is the nature of discipline. And I shouldn't have to say this, but I'll go ahead and say it. Chastisements and discipline by nature are unpleasant. That is the point. That's the point. The point of discipline is that it's unpleasant. The point is not that it is joyful, but that it is sorrowful. Discipline is intended to cause

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sorrow. So if you say, “God has brought an affliction into my life, and I am not enjoying this. This causes me deep grief and sorrow and pain in the moment,” that's the point. It's not intended in the moment to cause you anything else but the sorrow and the affliction and the trial that you are experiencing in that moment. That is the whole point of discipline. All discipline seems not in the moment to be joyful, but instead it is sorrowful.

All training, all discipline for a race, for instance, is intended to hurt. It's intended to be difficult. Remember, we are not that far removed from the athletic analogy in verses 1–3 of running the race, casting off the sin that so easily entangles us, and laying aside all of those encumbrances, and fixing our eyes on Jesus, the finish line, and running the race with the expectation of the reward that is to come. That's the athletic metaphor in verses 1–3. The author does not just flip the table over and begin a new metaphor in verse 4. There is a parenting parallel here with the discipline, but the idea of discipline itself is that of training and preparing one for things which are ahead. And that is the analogy here with discipline. The discipline is intended to train us for what lies ahead of us in the future—if that is difficulties that are to come in the future or usefulness in the kingdom in the future, or whether it is just simply ministry in this life that is in the future, or if it is so that we may enjoy more of a heavenly reward in the future. All of those things are the point of discipline. That affliction and that sorrow is the very purpose of the discipline in training us, in preparing us for what is to come.

You don't train for a race by sitting in the basement watching other people race on a television while you pound down a bag of Doritos and a two-liter of Pepsi. That might feel enjoyable in the moment, at least for half a bag of Doritos and half a two-liter of Pepsi. It might feel enjoyable in the moment. It might be something that you like at that point. It might taste good. It might be relaxing. It might be easy. It might be comfortable. But that's not training. When you go to the gym and train, then you're training. When you go out onto the practice field and train. When you are sweating, when you are straining, then you're training. I could trademark that. When you're straining, then you're training. But you don't train in a basement pounding back Doritos and Pepsi. But instead you have to put forth the effort. It has to be difficult, it has to be painful. That, in fact, is the whole point of discipline.

Listen to Spurgeon. I have, I think, four quotes from Spurgeon's sermon on this passage, and I would commend that you go read Charles Spurgeon's sermon on Hebrews 12:11. He does a better job in his sermon than I'm going to do today and next week on this

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passage. He does a far better job. For one, even though he's wordy, he's far more concise, and so it's one sermon instead of two. You're getting two for the price of one. And I don't mind saying that Spurgeon does a better job because I don't have to worry about you wishing that Spurgeon was here as your pastor because he's dead, and so you're stuck with me. Here's what Spurgeon says:

If affliction seemed to be joyous, would it be a chastisement at all? I ask you, would it not be a most ridiculous thing if a father should so chasten a child, that the child came down stairs [*sic*] laughing and smiling and rejoicing at the flogging? Joyous? Instead of being at all serviceable, would it not be utterly useless? What good could a chastisement have done if it were not felt? No smart? Then surely no benefit! It is the blueness of the wound, says Solomon, which makes the heart better. And so if the chastisement does not come home to the bone and flesh—if it does not distil [*sic*] the tear and extort the cry—what good end can it have served?

That's it. That's the purpose. That's the point of discipline. Because you and I learn through pain. We learn through adversity. God teaches us things in the midst of suffering that He does not teach us outside of suffering. I would dare to say even that He teaches us things in suffering that we could not learn outside of suffering. The suffering is the point.

There's a sanctifying work or effect that is going on. There is a difficulty that we face that when we come through that at the end, even if it means that we exit this life because of the suffering and we step into glory on a resurrection Sunday, for instance, and we stand in the presence of the Savior, and that's when the affliction ends, we learn something in that affliction, and listen, the affliction will cease the moment it ceases to be useful to the Lord. But as long as it is useful to His ends, then it will continue. And so we never have to get in the middle of affliction and say, "I think I've learned everything I can learn from this, but for some reason the affliction continues." No, the affliction is the point. The suffering is the point. If it were pleasant, then it would have no corrective power at all. It wouldn't make us hate this world and long for the next. It would make us love this world and forget about the next if afflictions were just enjoyable. Affliction wouldn't make us think about Heaven. And we would forget the future if it were peaceful, if it were enjoyable. If it were joyful in the moment, it would make us comfortable and we wouldn't cast off sin. Instead, we would trifle with sin. We'd play around with it. And we'd actually think, if we didn't have to go through afflictions which

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purged us of sin, we would actually begin to think that God Himself does not take sin seriously.

Another quote from Spurgeon. If discipline were pleasant, he says,

it might even work the other way and be hurtful. For the child would surely think that the parent only played with his disobedience and that the disobedience was a trifle, if those very gentle blows were enough, with one or two soft chiding words, to express parental hatred of sin. But if only the mockery of chastisement were given, the child would be hardened in sin, and even despise the authority which it ought to respect.

That's it. If the discipline or the chastisement does not sting, then the child has no sense that he has displeased the father. But if the chastisement is difficult, and if the chastisement is painful, then the child begins to be softened by the chastisement and begins to realize how seriously those who love him take his disobedience. And so if all God's chastisements were joyful and easy for us to endure and not difficult at all, we would start to think that God trifled with sin and that He didn't think it was that serious. And then we would begin to trifle with sin. Discipline is intended to make us hate sin as much as God hates sin. And God will take the sin of His children very, very seriously because He loves us that much. And He takes our holiness very, very seriously because He loves us that much.

Again, Spurgeon—you might start to wonder if it's Spurgeon who's preaching or me. It is me, quoting Spurgeon.

My brethren, if God sent us trials such as we would wish for, they would not be trials. If they were chastisements that on the very surface seemed to be joyous, then they were not chastisements. They would still be the sweets, the harmful sweets which children like to eat until they turn their stomachs and are overtaken with sickness.

See, if you and I were to write the script for our lives, we would write into it all kinds of riches and ease and comforts and conveniences and joy and delights and delightful adventures and things that were always happy to us. We would never write in anything difficult.

Now, maybe we would start to feel guilty after a few hundred pages of our life's manuscript, and we might write into it a few things, a few difficulties, just to sort of

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strike a balance. So we would have—for instance, we would show up at a restaurant and the food would be served cold. Or they would overdo our steak. Or you would accidentally burn a steak once a year. Have a sore throat once every four or five years. Or it might rain on your only day off during that week. Or you get stuck in traffic for twenty minutes. Those are the types of difficulties that we would write into our lives if we had the choice. And we would do that just for balance, you know, so that we could at least know what it's like to experience a little bit of affliction. Just last night, for instance, I was at a restaurant, and they didn't bring out the refills of the garlic fries nearly as fast as I would have liked them to have done that. In fact, I did not get a refill of garlic fries, all I got was a refill of normal fries. The indignity of that was almost unbearable. That's the type of affliction that we have to endure, and those are the types of things we would write into our lives.

But would you write into the script of your life the loss of a child, a miscarriage, the loss of a loved one, terminal illness, chronic pain, the death of a friend, betrayal? Would you write any of that into your lives? Not a single person here would. These are the things that God writes into our lives so that He might sanctify us by it. The affliction is the point. The pain of it is the point. God is not trying to keep you from sorrow, by the way. Let me bounce your mind back up to verse 6: “Those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.” Look at verse 8: “If you are without discipline, of which *all* have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons” (emphasis added). So every single child of God experiences discipline at some point and in some measure in this life for their sanctification. Every last one. And if you are without discipline, you are an illegitimate child, not a true legal child. You have no inheritance. You're not part of that family. If you're in the family, then discipline is your blessing. And all discipline is what? Sorrowful. Doesn't feel joyful. So therefore, if God's intention is to bring discipline into all of our lives, and all discipline is sorrowful, then sorrowful is His intention in the moment. In the moment. God is not trying to keep you from experiencing sorrow. If He were trying to do that, He is failing miserably because we've all experienced it.

Just yesterday, I stood at a graveside and buried somebody from our church family whom I love. This coming Friday, we're going to stand up here and we're going to have a memorial service for somebody else from our church body whom I love. Our lives are full of sorrow. God is not trying His best to keep you from experiencing it. That's not His intention. His intention is not to guard us from the difficulties of life. And as a parent, if you're a parent, you understand this. There are times when you know that you are going

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to make your child cry. It is unavoidable. I came to this conclusion early on in my parenting. There's no way that I can raise these children without making them cry. So I gave up trying to not make them cry. Now, I didn't start trying to make them cry, but I gave up trying to not make them cry because I understand that every time that I say no to something that they want, they're going to cry about that. Every time I say yes or do something that they don't want, they're going to cry about that. Every time that they don't get what they want or they get what they don't want, they're going to cry. So you just give up trying to keep your kids from crying. You realize that if they don't cry, I'll never teach them virtue. All the things that I want them to learn in this life are going to be learned through tears. And so the sooner we come to grips with that as earthly parents, the easier our parenting will be. And the sooner we come to grips with that as God's children, the easier it will be for us to embrace discipline. God is not trying to protect us from crying.

Now, this should not discourage you. I know at first glance it doesn't seem like I'm trying to not discourage you, but this should not discourage you. Let me give you two points of application that I want you to walk away with from this. Number one, you and I are not required to enjoy God's discipline. That's what verse 11 is saying. It's not intended to be joyful, but sorrowful. That means that you and I are not required to enjoy it. God doesn't demand that we love pain for the sake of pain, that we enjoy sorrow for the sake of sorrow. It's not His expectation. You and I are not biblically required or morally required by Scripture to enjoy trials or difficulties. We're not masochists. We are, however, required to enjoy the fruit of discipline. We do get the fruit of discipline that we get to enjoy, but we are not required to enjoy discipline itself.

Number two, it is OK to acknowledge that discipline is hard. It's OK to acknowledge that. In fact, if you are in the midst of discipline, admitting that you are suffering or sorrowful or that you're not delighting in it, you're not enjoying it, that doesn't make you less of a believer. Doesn't mean you're less mature. Doesn't mean you're less spiritual. Doesn't mean that you're less sanctified. A stoic disposition, the type of disposition that just grits its teeth and says, "No, my spine is stiff and my heart is hard and my neck is unbent, and I will not bow down before this," that's the despising of discipline that we talked about weeks ago. God does not require of us this sort of stoic "This has no effect on me. This isn't affecting me and my family at all" type of disposition. That is not the mark of spirituality or spiritual maturity. So, you're not required to enjoy discipline. And it is OK to admit that discipline is difficult.

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Paul didn't enjoy or rejoice in being in prison. He asked people to pray that he would be let out of prison. So he didn't enjoy the prison, but he rejoiced in the prison. Do you understand the difference between those two things? It's not the prison that brought him joy. The Lord brought him joy in the midst of the prison. So it is with affliction and difficulty. We don't take joy in a disease or a chronic illness or a chronic pain or the death of a loved one. There's no joy in that. There's no delight in that. There's no treasure in that. It's not that which we cherish and enjoy. But we can rejoice in the midst of the affliction. And that, in fact, is what we are called to do. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the grace of Christ, you and I are able to do that. To rejoice in the midst of the affliction. To give God praise. To bow our heads and our hearts under His hand, under His loving rod, and to say, "Lord, I will take this from Your hand, and I thank You for it. I don't understand what You're doing in it, but You will teach me through this, and so I will worship You. You give and You take away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." That response can be ours in the midst of discipline, even though we are not required to enjoy it or to love it.

In fact, recognizing that discipline is hard is a necessary prerequisite to verses 12 and 13. Look at verses 12 and 13. "Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed." That's the responsibility of the body in the life of those who are undergoing discipline and suffering affliction. We're to come alongside and recognize that discipline makes for a weakened state in the moment. Discipline makes for us to be lame and out of joint, and our knees are feeble, and our feet are uncertain. It's not easy on us. And so we recognize that, and we reach out to the body of Christ, who has to come alongside of us, has the joy of coming alongside of us and encouraging us in the midst of this. See, verses 12 and 13 are not unrelated to the issue of discipline. Verses 12 and 13 are the response of the body, other believers, around those who are enduring discipline, as they recognize discipline is difficult and sorrowful and a trial in the life of this person, so let's come alongside them and strengthen them in the midst of this so that they will not be put out of joint, that this will not ruin them, but instead produce in them the peaceable fruits of righteousness and give them the grace to share in God's holiness.

Now there are in verse 11 two things—two dangers, as it were—in our own assessment of afflictions that we need to be aware of. And the first is in that phrase "in the moment." I want you to notice it. "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful." The point here is not that discipline only lasts for a moment. In other

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words, the author's point here is not the brevity of the discipline, because that would not be true, would it? There is some discipline that lasts for a lifetime. You lose a child, that is something that sticks with you for the rest of your life. Or if you lose a spouse. Or if God allows for a diagnosis of a terminal illness in your life, an illness that will eventually take your life, that discipline is not for a moment, that discipline is for the rest of your life. Some affliction, some suffering, and some trials, in fact, last for the duration of our lives. So, the point of the author here is not that the affliction is just for a moment. He's not saying "Look, affliction is just for a moment, so just kind of blink and it'll be gone" or "Here's God's promise to you: it's not going to last long." There's no such promise in Scripture that afflictions and trials will not last long. They might last long. And they might be painful and last long. That's by God's hand as well.

Rather, the point of the author is in describing the perspective that we are to have upon the trials. We are not to judge the benefit and the fruitfulness of affliction in the moment that we are enduring it, that is to say, in the present. All discipline does not seem to be joyful in the present. In the moment of the affliction, it is not joyful. And here's the danger. The danger is that you and I would begin to pass judgment on the fruitfulness of the affliction or begin to pass judgment on God's faithfulness to us in the midst of that affliction based upon either how we feel or based upon the fact that what we are enduring right now is what we're experiencing in the present. In other words, I judge God's plan and His purposes, which are overarching and lifelong, in terms of what I am suffering or enduring in the moment. In the moment, it's sorrowful. Therefore, don't view God's hand, His purposes, and His love through the sorrow, but instead recognize that you as a creature are limited by your perspective in the moment. A sinful response would be to say "I don't see the point in all of this, and I don't see even now what I'm learning in the midst of this affliction. Therefore, because I don't see it right now in the moment, God must not have a purpose for it." Or "Because I'm not experiencing this peace in the moment, there must be no peace to come." Or "Because I don't see the fruit of this, and I am not enduring the joy of this, and I don't see the delight in this in the moment, therefore God can have no purposes that transcend that moment." That's the point of the author. It is with the eye of faith that you and I must assess affliction. It's with the eye of faith that says God is a good God, God is a sovereign God, and every last thing that He appoints for me is for His glory and is for my good. And it is because of His infinite love for me that I can look beyond how I feel about this in the moment and see the hand of God writ large in my life.

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In Romans 8:18, Paul says, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” Notice the contrast: the sufferings of this present age and the glory that is to be revealed. Paul says that they're not worthy to be compared. You put my suffering and you put the glory side by side, one next to another, and you start to draw comparisons to them, and they're not worthy to be compared. They're apples and they're oranges. They're two totally different things. They're not even in the same category. The one does not even deserve to be put up next to the other. So my afflictions are here, the glory is here, and the glory is such that when I put them side by side, that's the perspective, that I have to push the afflictions away and say, “It's the glory that overshadows all of that.” But in the moment, the only thing we can see is the affliction because we cannot see the glory with the eyes of flesh. But with the eyes of faith, we can step back and say, “God is good. God is sovereign. So every last thing that He has appointed for me is for His glory, and it is for my good.” So we can say, “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:17). Not worthy to be compared. Sufferings in the moment are always overwhelming. They're always overwhelming.

The second danger that we run into is the danger of assessing our sufferings, our afflictions and discipline, not just by what is in the moment, but by what appears, or seems to be, with the eye of flesh. And this is in the phrase *what it seems*. “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful” (Heb. 12:11).

See, these are two dangers that we fall into. The one is to assess everything on the basis of what we experience in the moment. The other is to assess all of God's purposes and plans in terms of what appears to us to be the case in the moment. This word *seems* here is the word from *dokeō*. It's a verb that describes to perceive or to think, to suppose or to presume or to assume, to believe. It describes what strikes the senses, what appears to the senses, and not the spiritual senses, not the eye of faith, but the natural senses. What strikes the eye in the moment. And this, unfortunately in this world, is all that we have to go by in terms of our fleshly afflictions and what seems to us and the assessment that we can make in this world. If it's just in terms of the moment, and if it's just in terms of our assessment of it in this world from what we can see, then we will always despair in the moment of the afflictions. This is the assessment of flesh and blood, how it appears to us.

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So in the moment, we use the mind of flesh and the heart of flesh and our own sinful reasoning and our own warped evaluation, and we take what appears to us in the moment concerning our difficulties or our trials, and we make an assessment of God's purposes based upon that. How it appears or seems to us. But are we perfect in our perception of reality, spiritually speaking? Are we even close to perfect in our perception of reality? We most certainly are not. We are prone to deception. We are prone to mistakes. We are limited in our knowledge, our wisdom. Our assessment is therefore limited. Our discernment is limited. We can't see the future. We can't see the unknown or unseen realm. We don't know what the future holds for us, so the difficulty that we are enduring right now may in fact be preparing us for something even greater later on, and not a difficulty, but a blessing. But we can't see that because we have eyes of flesh. And without the eyes of faith, we cannot even believe that God would be doing something like that through our discipline. We can't see everything unfolding in our lives. There are tons of things that are hidden from us that we don't know. Dangers which we might face. Sins that threaten to undo us. The devil's designs in our lives. All of that is unknown to us. And so the minute we begin to assess our discipline based upon how it seems to us in the moment, we have immediately stepped into the darkness and begun leading ourselves around into ditches. And the author is saying you can't do that.

Last quote from Spurgeon:

So it is with many of us. We are so jealous of our own ease and pleasure that the moment we even see the rod, we are affrighted and alarmed. And at the very first stroke of it, before it has even made the flesh to tingle, we think it is utterly unbearable and that God intends to destroy us. What then? With the clouds of fear, the dust of unbelief, the smoke of ignorance, and the mist of selfishness, it is little wonder that we do not perceive the truth. And thus we say no chastisement seems to be joyous.

See, that's the assessment of the flesh, the mist of unbelief, the smoke of doubt, the delusion of our lack of discernment. We can't see even 1 percent of what is real concerning our lives, the lives of others, or our futures. We don't have any of that. We are blind men in a dark room with black walls on the surface of the room. And we are stumbling about in the midst of our affliction. And in comes the truth of Scripture, and the light comes on in the room, and the light says God is good, God is sovereign, and every last thing that He has appointed for us is for our good, even if it is difficult. Even if the sorrow in the moment seems unbearable, God is doing something good through it.

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So you can either stiffen your neck and resist that, or you can bow your head and embrace it. But stiffening our necks and resisting that, it's not going to unlock the door and get us out of that dark room. We just simply do not know what all is going on, and we have to confess our ignorance. In fact, that's the best that we can do, is to confess our ignorance in that moment. Not to judge or assess the work and the hand and the purposes of God upon what seems to be true—appears to us in the moment—but based upon what God's Word says is true. And that takes the eye of faith.

William Cowper, in his hymn *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*, has these lines:

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.
His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flow'r."

It seems to us, in the moment, to be sorrowful. That's the bud—has a bitter taste—but sweet will be the flower. Afterwards, it will yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Now God's discipline is intended to produce in us holiness, the fruit of righteousness, and we're going to look more at the peaceful fruit of righteousness next week. We are to pursue holiness, and we are to pursue righteousness in our lives. One of the intentions of God in discipline is so that we might hate sin as much as He hates it and cast it aside and lay it aside and pursue holiness and pursue righteousness, turn from our sin, repent, trust Him for His grace each and every hour. We are to pursue that. As Hebrews 12:14 says, we're to "pursue peace with all men, and the [holiness or] sanctification without which no one will see the Lord." We're to pursue that holiness. And to that end, we engage in self-examination before the Lord's Table. I'm going to read to you 1 Corinthians chapter 11, which describes God's discipline, His disciplining work, and the purpose of examining ourselves before Him. First Corinthians 11:23–32:

23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread;

24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

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25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.

27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.

30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.

31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.

32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world. (NASB)

There is a sobering reminder in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, namely that one of the things that God does in order to purge us of sin is to bring discipline and chastisement. So Paul says examine yourselves, mortify the sin, put the sin off so that God will not judge you through discipline. He doesn’t mean “judge” in the sense of eternal damnation, but that there is a discipline that happens in our lives that is intended to rid us of sin. And if we persist in it, then all we’re doing is saying, “Lord, You have given me opportunities to turn from this sin, to mortify it, to put it to death, and to pursue righteousness, but I am refusing to do that, so therefore, bring discipline into my life to do that.” Now that’s not actually what you’re saying with your words, that’s what you’re saying by your life. So this is serious. We don’t trifle with sin. It is a profane thing to have sin in our hearts that we are not dealing with, that we leave unresolved and unconfessed and unrepented of, and then to come to the Lord’s Table and to partake of this and to make a mockery of the blood of Christ and the death of Christ. So the invitation is to examine yourself, identify your sin, turn from that sin so that God will not judge you by bringing chastisement into your life to purge you from that very sin. So if you want to make the chastisements of the Lord only those things which are absolutely necessary in your life,

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then do the work of putting off sin in your own life so that He will not chastise you in order to do that work.

If you're an unbeliever here and you have never repented of your sin and trusted Christ for salvation, you've never been born again, then this Table's not for you at all. Because that is an ultimate blasphemy for you to claim that you have a part in this when you are not part of the body of Christ. These are the elements of His death, His sacrificial death on the cross for His people. God commands you first to repent of your sin and trust in the Savior and be born again so that you might have eternal life, and then you can come to the Table and enjoy the elements with the people of God. So if that doesn't describe you, if you are not a believer, then please don't partake of these elements. You're eating and drinking judgment to yourself.

For the believers, our duty is very solemn. We are to solemnly examine ourselves, to confess our sin to the Lord. We can confess that the things which we are required to do we have not done, and the things that we are told not to do, those are the things that we have done. Confess those to the Lord, turn from those, and pray for His grace to strengthen us in resisting sin. So let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

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