

Sermon: Delight in Discipline - Hebrews 12

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Scriptures: Hebrews 12:4-11

Introduction

Athletics - football in the fall, basketball in the winter, baseball in the spring and summer - provided the competition with opponents and the camaraderie with teammates that I enjoyed as a teenager. What I did not like about competitive athletics, however, was the conditioning - repetitive calisthenics, endless drills, and habitually running.

A word that I came to dread in each of these running experiences was "Again." Meaning we would run, all out to the point of exhaustion, thinking that was the last one only to hear our coach say "Again."

Perhaps, you have forgotten that experience in your own life or maybe you have never had the pleasure. In the movie *Miracle* regarding the 1980 United States Olympic hockey team's triumphant victory over the Soviet Union, Coach Herb Brooks handpicked a group of undisciplined kids and trained them to play like they had never played before. He broke them to make them. Following a tie with the Norwegian National team, Herb Brooks made his players stay on the ice and sprint "suicides." He made them do it over and over, repeating the word "Again." (The video clip from the movie *Miracle* would be appropriate to show here or you can tell the story.)

Tom Landry, former head coach of the Dallas Cowboys, said, "The job of a coach is to make players do what they don't want to do, in order to achieve what they've always wanted to be."

As other coaches have said, "No pain, no gain."

Similarly, to become a spiritual champion requires doing things that we don't want to do, in order to achieve what we've always wanted to be - like Jesus. Spiritual growth will not occur without pain. Sorry. It's just a reality.

The writer of Hebrews and other biblical writers refer to this pain as discipline. Hebrews 12:7 states, "Endure it as discipline" (Heb. 12:7 HCSB). In this case, discipline is not the spiritual practices like scripture memorization, prayer, or fasting. Rather, the discipline is hardship or spiritual conditioning that comes in the form of testing, suffering, trials, and affliction.

Think about it. Reflecting on your life, has not one of the most formative factors in your spiritual growth been the times of anguish and pain you have experienced? And, if you didn't learn the lesson the first time, God said, "Again." Ironically, the role of suffering and hardship is one of the most neglected issues in becoming a spiritual champion, because we do not arrange for it to happen as we might Bible study or prayer. Instead, life inevitably arranges it for us.

By the way, what test are you going through? Where are you suffering? What trial is getting you down? Would any of these "painful" events or seasons be corrective measures of God to steer you back on the track toward becoming a spiritual champion? In other words, have you ever considered that the tests, trials, and sufferings that you are faced with are God's way of disciplining you?

I. Discipline defined

The word discipline is used ten times in Hebrews 12:4-11. Short story writers not novelists wrote the Bible. So each word in the Bible is very important. And when the same word is used ten times in eight verses, it is highly significant.

A. What it is

Discipline means training. In other passages of Scripture, the word is used in reference to a father training his children, or training in righteousness, or in this context God training his children. The writer of Hebrews is saying that God lovingly disciplines his children to train them to become spiritual champions. It is meant to draw us away from what will cause us harm and lead us into the likeness of Jesus. It is a spiritual maturing process that God allows us to experience to become like Christ. It is God's effort in my life to realign my will to his.

B. What it is not

Discipline is not punishment. Sometimes when hardships and calamity fall upon us we think that these sufferings are the punishments for our sinfulness. Hardship and suffering are not God's way of getting even. Neither is it his means of retaliating for the wrongs we have committed. God's discipline is not the sentence for our sin. The punishment for our sin was laid on Jesus at the cross, once and forever.

When God disciplines us he is not getting us back; he is drawing us back. He seeks to bring us back to his will, from that which will destroy us, and toward his likeness.

In order for us to receive his discipline in the spirit in which it was intended, we must understand God's role and our response.

II. God's role

God filters the events of life through his sovereign fingers so that we might become more and more like his Son, Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul stated, "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose. For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:28-29 HCSB). God's role in our life is to make us like his Son.

A novice once asked the great Michelangelo how he sculptured such beautiful statues. Pointing to an angel he had just chiseled out of marble, he said, "I saw the angel in the marble, I chiseled until I set it free."

In a similar vein, yet not as eloquent, a southern artisan had completed sculpting a horse out of rock. Bewildered by the transformation, a spectator said, "How in the world did you do it?" The artist replied, "I knock everything off that don't look like a horse."

Likewise, God wants to free us to be all that we can be. He has to knock off the rough edges of our sinfulness, chisel away the wrongful attitudes, and sandpaper our character flaws. For that to happen he disciplines us.

A. God is a disciplinarian

He is like a coach who practices, drills, instructs, and corrects his players so that they can be in top shape for a game or a race.

B. God's discipline is a sign of a personal relationship

"For the Lord disciplines the one He loves . . . God is dealing with you as sons" (Heb. 12:6-7 HCSB). God's discipline is compared to a parent's discipline of a child. A parent only has jurisdiction over his or her own children. Because of the relationship, the parent has an intimate concern and understanding of that child. As a result, a loving parent administers the discipline with an eye on helping the child become all that they can become.

God's discipline flows out of his love for us. We are his children. Unlike human parents, he never disciplines in anger. If he did he would destroy us, reducing us to nothing (Jeremiah 10:24). He may have to discipline us severely at times, but he would never kill us (Psalm 118:18).

When faced with the hardship of God's discipline, we should accept it as God's method of training and as a token that we are beloved children of God.

God loves us just the way we are, but he refuses to let us stay that way. He wants us to be just like Jesus. Don't take his discipline as anger toward you, take it as affirmation that you are his child, that he believes in you, and that he wants nothing but the best for you. He's a loving parent that refuses to give up on you.

C. God's discipline is oftentimes painful

"No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful" (Heb. 12:11 HCSB). I remember the switching I received from my mother. I can't forget the paddling I got from a teacher. It hurt. Discipline is rarely painless. But, a double meaning exists in the word painful. Discipline hurts the receiver and the giver. I had to become a parent to understand the words my parents said before enacting a punishment, "This is going to hurt me as much as you." Discipline hurts - God and us. God doesn't like it anymore than we do.

D. God disciplines for an ultimate purpose

Never is the hardship and suffering sent our way capriciously. "He does it for our benefit" (Heb. 12:10 HCSB). His ultimate purpose is to make us like his son (Romans 8:29). In order for that to happen, he has to change us. Ultimately, that is the purpose of all discipline, whether it is from a parent, or a coach, or from God. God seeks to change our behavior, our actions, our thoughts, and our motives.

It has been said that God comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. God sacrifices our comfort to make us conformed to his character.

E. God's discipline seeks a finished product

"He does it for our benefit . . . that we can share His holiness . . . it yields the fruit of peace and righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:10-11 HSCB). God wants us to break through the tape by becoming a spiritual champion. The signs of that occurring are: sharing in his holiness, displaying a harvest of righteousness, and living a life of peace. Upward we are holy - set apart like God, outward we are righteous - acting like God, and inward we have peace - the calmness of God.

Don't you want that kind of life - one lived right that has a profound tranquility? It all hinges on your response to God's discipline.

III. Our response

Having come to an understanding of God's role in the disciplinarian process, let's look at our response. What is our reaction when our loving Heavenly Father disciplines us? We have three possible reactions.

A. We can resent God's discipline bitterly

The author of Hebrews quotes Proverbs 3:11 that says, "Do not despise the Lord's instruction, my son" (Prov. 3:11 HCSB). My trusty thesaurus offers the following synonym for despises: loathe, scorn, look down on, hate, spurn. And for resent it recommends dislike, hate, take exception to, rail against. Yet many people do just that when the hardships of life come. As a result, they become bitter, hardened, scornful, and filled with hate.

Discipline not rightly received sours rather than sweetens the character.

B. We can accept God's discipline grudgingly

When the pain and hardships come on our lives we can endure them but not be happy about it. In this scenario, we often question God, "Why are you doing this to me?" We know that we are God's children; we just can't understand why he would be putting us to the test. Somehow we have the attitude that as believers we are above the painful realities of life. That in some way our Christian credentials give us a primary status that is to protect us from the hurts and heartaches. Instead of asking God, "Why?" we would be better off asking, "What are you teaching me?"

C. We can embrace God's discipline willingly

The writer of Hebrews states, "Shouldn't we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live?" (Heb. 12:9 HCSB). Discipline is always preparatory to blessing and can bring nothing but blessing when rightly received. To embrace God's discipline is to understand that a loving God will never chastise his children capriciously. His discipline is to prune every branch in our lives that does not bear fruit so that our lives can increase its yield. His discipline is purposeful and brings us life.

To embrace God's discipline willfully is reflected by James and Paul. James wrote, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds . . . so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2,4 HCSB). Paul stated, "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10 HCSB).

When our attitudes are right, God can use those hardships to change us more like his son. When that happens we will cross the tape becoming a spiritual champion.

Conclusion

For all His children, God would like for them to be like His Son. And to accomplish that purpose he disciplines his children. And for us his children to become like Jesus we must embrace his discipline willfully, again and again.

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