



# The Book of Hebrews

## Chapter 12: 1-13

August 26th , 2018

### God Disciplines His Children

Hebrews was written primarily to a Jewish audience. Because they had forsaken Judaism for Christ, they were facing bitter opposition. There was a danger that they might interpret their suffering as a sign of God's displeasure and become discouraged and give up. Potentially, they might even be tempted to return to the temple and its ceremonies.

The author of Hebrews wanted to convey to his audience in chapter 12, that their sufferings were not unique. That with faith and endurance, they could persevere over whatever hardships they were facing.

### Run for Your Life

**Hebrews 12:1-4 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. <sup>4</sup> In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*

### Metaphors and Similes of Christian Life

#### “Warfare”

**2 Timothy 2:3 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> *Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.*

**Ephesians 6:11 (ESV)** <sup>11</sup> *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.*

#### “Boxing”

**1 Corinthians 9:26 (ESV)** <sup>26</sup> *So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.*

**2 Timothy 4:7 (ESV)** <sup>7</sup> *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*

#### “Servitude”

**Romans 1:1 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,*

**Philippians 1:1 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,...*

**Titus 1:1 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect...*

#### “Race”

**1 Corinthians 9:24 (ESV)** <sup>24</sup> *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.*

**Galatians 5:7 (ESV)** <sup>7</sup> *You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?*

**Philippians 2:16 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup> *holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.*

It is this analogy of a race that the writer of Hebrews uses to describe the life of a Christian. In these few verses we see various aspects of the race, presented as an example of and compared to, a faithful life in Christ.

The Greek word used here in verse one for endurance (*hupomonē*) which means a steady determination to keep going. It means continuing even when everything in you wants to slow down or give up.

The Greek word for race here is “*agōn*”, from which we get the word agony.

**Question for discussion:** In the opening of chapter 12, the writer points out that the readers are surrounded by “so great a cloud of witnesses,...”. Who are these witnesses he is referring to? What do you believe the purpose of making this statement was and why might it have been necessary?

**Question for discussion:** We are told to lay aside every *weight* or *encumbrance*. Encumbrance (*onkos*) is simply a bulk or mass of something. Even though we don’t know exactly what the writer is referring to, in the context of Hebrews, what do you think is most likely being referenced?

## The Example to Follow

**Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)** *...<sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

We are to focus on Jesus because He is the author and perfecter of faith. He is the supreme example of our faith. Here He is the author (*archēgos*) of faith. He is the pioneer or originator, the one who begins and takes the lead. Christ is our preeminent example of faith.

**Question for discussion:** There’s a saying in which we are all familiar...“Walk a mile in my shoes...”. What is meant by this? What is the point of the statement?

***“If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.”***  
– Atticus Finch in *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

**Hebrews 4:15 (ESV)** *<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*

**Mathew 4:1-3 (ESV)** *<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”*

When the devil tempted Him in the wilderness, Jesus’ reply each time was the expression of trust in His Father and His Word. Jesus would not bypass the Father’s will just to get food, or to test His Father’s protection or lordship. He would wait until the Father supplied or protected or directed.

**John 5:30 (ESV)** *<sup>30</sup> “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.*

**Mathew 26:39 (ESV)** *<sup>39</sup> And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”*

Jesus not only is the author of faith, but also its perfecter (*teleiōtēs*), the One who carries it through to completion. He continued to trust His Father until He could say, “It is finished!” (John 19:30).

**Hebrews 12:3-4 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. <sup>4</sup> In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

**Question for discussion:** What point is the author making by this statement in verse 4... “In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”?

## God Disciplines His Children

In verse 5, the analogy used by the author changes from a race, to that of a family and provides the proper context with which to view personal suffering.

**Hebrews 12:5-10 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. <sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

<sup>7</sup> It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup> If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup> Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? <sup>10</sup> For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

In verse 5, the writer is referring back to scripture from the book of Proverbs...

**Proverbs 3:11-12 (ESV)** <sup>11</sup> My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, <sup>12</sup> for the Lord proves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

The key word in this section is **discipline**. It's used here both as a noun and a verb. It's from the Greek word “**paideia**”, which, in turn, comes from “**pais**” (“child”) and denotes the training of a child. The word is a broad term, signifying whatever parents and teachers do to train, correct, cultivate, and educate children in order to help them develop and mature as they should. It is used nine times in this brief segment of scripture.

**Question for Discussion:** in verse 5 it reads...“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,... what is the message or point the author is making here?

## Purpose of God's Discipline

God uses hardship and affliction as a means of discipline, a means of training His children, of helping them mature in their spiritual lives. We can consider at least three specific purposes for His discipline: **correction**, **prevention**, and **education**.

### Corrective Discipline

We experience some of God's discipline as the direct result of our sin, but the punishment is corrective, not judgmental. It is punishment, to be sure, but not the eternal or final punishment that unbelievers receive.

**2 Samuel 12:10 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup> Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. <sup>11</sup> Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. <sup>12</sup> For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.’”

David was a better man because of God's discipline. God had a purpose in the discipline—to draw His servant closer to Himself, to convince him not to sin again, and to help him grow and mature.

**1 Corinthians 11:20-22 (ESV)** <sup>20</sup> *When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. <sup>21</sup> For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.*

The church at Corinth was particularly immature and carnal. Among other things, many believers were abusing the Lord's Table. They were using it as an excuse for partying, with some even getting drunk.

Paul rebuked them strongly and told them plainly that they were suffering weakness, sickness, and even death because of this sinfulness (v. 30). They were being "disciplined by the Lord in order that [they would] not be condemned along with the world" (v. 32).

### **Preventative Discipline**

Sometimes God disciplines in order to prevent sin. Just as we put restrictions and limits, and sometimes literal fences, around our children to protect them from harm, so God does with us.

**2 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)** <sup>7</sup> *So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.*

God allowed this "messenger of Satan" to "harass" Paul not because His beloved and faithful apostle was proud, but to keep him from **becoming** proud. The thorn in the flesh was sent to protect his spiritual well-being. Paul did not enjoy the thorn, and pleaded earnestly with the Lord on three occasions to remove it. But when God assured him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness," Paul gladly accepted the thorn.

### **Educational Discipline**

Besides punishing and preventing, God's discipline also educates us for better service and growth in the Spirit. It will teach us, if we will listen to what He is saying through it. Sometimes God can get our attention better through affliction than through blessing.

The best example of God's educational discipline can be found in the book of Job. By God's own declaration, Job was "blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil"

**Job 1:1 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.*

Yet God allowed him to suffer pain, loss, grief, sickness, and ridicule that make Paul's thorn in the flesh, whatever it was, seem insignificant by comparison. Just as Paul's thorn, Job's afflictions were messengers of Satan and came upon him with God's approval.

**Job 42:1-6 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *Then Job answered the Lord and said: <sup>2</sup> "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. <sup>3</sup> Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. <sup>4</sup> 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.' <sup>5</sup> I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; <sup>6</sup> therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."*

Through his great and seemingly unending suffering Job had been given a magnificent view of God. He experienced His holy majesty, His deliverance, His care, His power, His counsel, His defense—all through His discipline. Job also learned

a great lesson about himself: that his wisdom was not God's wisdom. He learned to trust God for who He is, not for what he himself could see and comprehend. When we see God better, we see ourselves better.

**Question for discussion:** Have you experienced difficulty in your life that in hindsight reflected God's loving, training hand. An experience that once through, resulted in spiritual growth in you or a loved one and a closer walk with God? If so, would you be willing to share the experience?

## God's Discipline has Purpose and Works to Our Benefit

**Hebrews 12:11-13 (ESV)** <sup>11</sup> *For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.* <sup>12</sup> *Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,* <sup>13</sup> *and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.*



John Henry Jowett was an influential British Protestant preacher at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century and wrote many books on topics related to Christian living. In his work, "Life in the Heights", Jowett points out that God's discipline is always perfect. His love is infinite and His wisdom is infallible...

*"The purpose of God's chastening is not punitive but creative. He chastens "that we may share His holiness." The phrase "that we may share" has direction in it, and the direction points toward a purified and beautified life. The fire which is kindled is not a bonfire, blazing heedlessly and unguardedly, and consuming precious things; it is a refiner's fire, and the Refiner sits by it, and He is firmly and patiently and gently bringing holiness out of carelessness and stability out of weakness. God is always creating even when He is using the darker means of grace. He is producing the fruits and flowers of the Spirit. His love is always in quest of lovely things."*

*J. H. Jowett, Life in the Heights, pp. 247, 248.*