

DISCIPLINE AS SONS

Genesis 12:3–11 • Pastor Luke Herche

If you would turn with me in your Bibles now to Hebrews chapter 12, our sermon text for this morning is Hebrews 12 verses 3 through 11, and before we read that together, let's pray together one more time.

Our Father, you are our Good Shepherd. Well, Jesus, you are our Good Shepherd. We come to you now. We pray that you would shepherd us even in this moment, even as we read your word, even as we meditate on your word. We pray Lord Jesus, that you would shepherd us by your Spirit that you would lead us to yourself, that you would give us a clear sight of your grace and your mercy, and that you would help us to rely on that, even in the midst of the valley of the shadow of death. Teach us to do that. Teach us to walk with you through the valley to rest in your presence in the valley that you would be honored and glorified as we walk by faith and not by sight. As we keep our eyes on you and the joy set before us, we pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

Again, our Scripture reading for this morning/our sermon text is Hebrews chapter 12 verses 3 through 11. Hebrews 12, beginning in verse 3:

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 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. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

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? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 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? 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. 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.

When we suffer in big ways or small, we want to make sense out of our suffering. That is why one of the first questions we ask is "Why?" Sometimes it's "Why does this always happen to me?" Sometimes it's a more deep, more reflective "Why?" When 9/11 happened, there was a lot of speculation about God's role in it, as there has been more recently with the pandemic. Some said that God was judging the nation; others that God had nothing to do with it. I find that these two options lack imagination, and they put us in the (I think) unbiblical position of saying that either God is angry or He is absent, not to mention the fact that they speculated on the secret motives of God. But think about how this often works out in your personal life. Something bad happens and some say, "Well, God is mad at you. That's why there is trouble in your life. If you would only repent, it would all go away." But others say, "God doesn't have anything to do with your trouble, don't blame Him." But again, either God is angry, or God is absent, those are the options given to us. Well, what about God is loving? I mean, can you imagine the possibility that your trials and your struggles somehow in some way are for your good, and come from the hand of a loving God? God's not angry with you, but neither is He absent; He loves you and everything that happens in the lives of His children is for their ultimate good.

Now I know how hard that is to comprehend. I know how bad the bad can be. But just think of the options: God is angry, or God is absent, or if not absent, at least impotent. No God is loving, and powerful, and even in our suffering, God is loving His children. And so, we're going to talk about our suffering today as we have been doing quite a bit, and we're there because the people to whom this letter was written were also suffering. According to Hebrews chapter 10, verses 32–34, they endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, even accepting the plundering of their property. Now they had not yet resisted, to the point of shedding blood, says chapter 12 verse 4, but they had resisted. They had endured hardship and persecution, and they did so for the sake of discipline. Now, this word "discipline" means "training" or "education." It's actually one of the Greek words from which we get the English word "pedagogy." The Hebrew people were learning lessons in the school of Hard Knocks. Another way of thinking about this discipline, or this idea of discipline, is by thinking about the discipline of an athlete. The word is used that way in the Greek world. To be an athlete requires discipline; it's not easy, it's not always fun and involves pain, but it's worth it. And of course, the context of Hebrews 12 3–11 is the **race set before us** in verses one and two. So if you're going to run a race, that requires discipline. So God is like an athletic coach disciplining His people as a father also might train or educate or discipline his children. And so, we're going to break down this idea of discipline or training, and we're going to see five things about it: the backdrop, which is sonship; the model

which is Jesus; the fountain, which is love; the purpose, which is holiness; and the exhortation in the midst of it, which is to endure. So the backdrop (sonship), the model (Jesus), the fountain (love), the purpose (holiness), and the exhortation (to endure).

First, the backdrop (sonship).

How does God think about you? Right now, right here, as you sit in your living room or in your dining room, or wherever you are, how does God think about you? Does God think about you as His slaves? Does God think of you as expendable? Does God think of you as primarily a sinner? Is God disappointed with you? Is He in heaven saying "Tisk, tisk, I can't believe you did that again? Does God shake His head when He thinks of you, or avert His eyes, or get red in the face? Or does God think you can do no wrong, "Everything you do is just the best!" Well, our passage this morning wants us to see that God thinks of us as sons. Look again at verses 5–7: **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. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." 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?** Now the writer here is quoting Proverbs chapter 3, verses 11–12, and he directly applies the book of Proverbs to his readers, it's wonderful. Part of his application is "you are sons." He mentions that twice. In verse 5, he says, **have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?** And then in verse 7 he says **God is treating you as sons.** Now we can't go over everything the New Testament says about our adoption as sons, in fact, we talked about that recently in a Sunday afternoon service. But the main point is this: not everyone is a son of God or a child of God. We become sons only in the Son, Jesus. Our adoption is by faith, a faith worked in us by the Spirit of adoption. And the word "son", of course, is not to denigrate women, but actually to dignify them in that culture because women too, in Christ, have equal status as sons. So if you are in Christ, you are a son, or it is fair to say a child of God. There could be no more important relationship. Scripture says that outside of Christ, we are children of the devil and children of wrath, but in Christ, we are children of God. And to be a son is to be in a place of dignity and even authority. Sons had a certain amount of authority in the home in the ancient Near East. The son was the heir, the one who would inherit the whole estate. Which of course brings up a question: if the son is authority and heir and we are sons, why would the Father allow his sons to suffer? As we think about this life, this this doesn't feel like reigning. It doesn't feel like authority. This doesn't feel like inheriting the good gifts of our Father. In fact, more often than not, it feels like death.

Which brings us to point two: the model, Jesus.

Jesus is the Son. Jesus' sonship was established early on in the Book of Hebrews, right, quoting Psalm 2, he said, **You are my Son; today I have begotten you.** [Psalm 2:7] and 2 Samuel 7, **I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.** [2 Samuel 7:14]. Jesus is the eternal Son of God. And the Incarnate Jesus therefore (Jesus, having taken on human skin), is the human Son of God. The son is the one who would inherit all things and reign over all things, as Psalm 2 says. Jesus is that son, as demonstrated in His Resurrection. Paul says in Romans 1:4 that Jesus was **declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.** So the Resurrection, as a fulfillment of so many of the promises of the Psalms' promises to God's Son, demonstrates the sonship of Jesus. And the writer of Hebrews tells us in verse 3 to consider Him. **Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.** Jesus endured hostility, and that endurance somehow gives us the ability to ourselves endure. We think God's sons should go free, but Jesus, the Son, suffered. Consider the connection between the two that our writer made earlier between Jesus Sonship and His suffering. In Hebrews chapter 5:8, **Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.** or Hebrews 2: 10, we were told that Jesus was made **perfect through suffering.** After beginning the Book of Hebrews with this exalted view of sonship as the heir of all things, the writer brings us down to Earth: of the heartbeat of sonship here and now is suffering.

Why? Well he told us in Hebrews 5, Jesus **learned obedience through what he suffered.** Now I want you to know it was not because Jesus was disobedient that He suffered. Nevertheless, through suffering He learned obedience. And part of that at least is this: that only when obedience becomes hard do I really understand what obedience is. Only when it is hard do I find the temptation not to obey. So one learns obedience only in suffering. And submission is not submission if I always agree, it's just agreement. Obedience is not obedience if it always feels good, it's just doing what feels good. But our obedience is tested the moment it begins to hurt. Hence, Jesus learned what it really means to obey through suffering, and so He became perfect through suffering that is perfectly suited as our obedient Savior. Now, apparently there was a saying in ancient Greek, translated, "To learn is to suffer." And I'm sure that saying has many implications, but one at least, was this: learning always involves suffering (most high school students will tell you that that's true, right?). The point is if there's no struggle, there's no learning. Notice this is not about punishment, Jesus did suffer the punishment for our sins. All of His suffering was substitutionary; He did not deserve the least trouble, but the purpose mentioned here was not bearing sin, but learning obedience. Jesus Himself was not being corrected. Hebrews 5 is not saying "Jesus disobeyed, God corrected Him, and He learned the right way." Yet nevertheless, **he learned obedience through what he suffered.** Consider Jesus. It's essential that we have Jesus in mind as we think about God's discipline of us, to which we now turn.

So the backdrop of discipline is our sonship. The model for discipline is then Jesus, who is the Son. And third, the fountain of discipline is love.

This is where we tend to break down, I think. It's hard for us to imagine that discipline comes from love. We think of discipline as parents coming to an end of their rope, and then taking that out on their children. Child disobeys, dad gets angry, and then disciplines his child. Except that's not discipline; that's punishment, even vengeance. Sadly, most of us dads have been there at one point or another. If I'm mad at you, and going to make you pay, well, that's not discipline, that's punishment. But notice verse 6. Verse 6 says, **For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.** What motivates God's disciplining His children here? Love. He loves them. Notice verse 10, which we'll come back to later, it says God **disciplines us for our good.** He wants what is best for us. Discipline is not God getting angry and then taking it out on us. It's not God giving you what does you deserve, or making you pay for the wrong that you've done. Discipline is training. It's education, like the athlete who puts in the hours of excruciating practice, or the musician who does the same. To suffer is to learn. When we talk about God's discipline, we mean God training us through hardship, not God punishing us for being bad. They're totally different things, especially when we the way we feel about them. If I think every time something bad happens, God is punishing me for being bad, I am going to grow weary under that hardship. But if I know that God is training me through this difficulty, that God loves me and He's shaping me and molding me through the trials that I experience, I'm going to experience them a very different way. Now that discipline will be in response to my need for growth, but that's not the same thing as punishment. Athletes and musicians need to grow. Practice and rehearsals are not punishment, though they are discipline, training. Hence, God disciplines those He loves. Until we see our loving Father in our trials, we cannot understand them.

Now again, I know how hard this can be. I know it doesn't always make sense. I know it seems impossible at times to reconcile the extent of our suffering with the love of our Father. In fact, we are more likely to say things like, "If this is from God's hand, it's child abuse, not discipline." My response though would be twofold. First is I don't understand either. It doesn't make sense. It's OK not to understand. That doesn't mean it's not true. Just because I don't understand the relationship between the Father's love and my suffering doesn't mean it's not there. It just means I can't understand it, and that's OK. Just because I don't have all the answers doesn't mean there aren't any answers, it just means I don't have them. Of course, the analogy is imperfect, as all analogies are, but this is a Scriptural analogy, we are to learn from it. God wants us to see our troubles as His loving, fatherly work in our lives.

Second, consider Jesus. Whatever we endure, He endured worse, rejected by His own people, considered crazy by His own family, mocked as demon possessed,

betrayed, abandoned, stripped, ridiculed, accused, falsely convicted, beaten, mocked some more, crucified, naked, forsaken by His Father. Now the point is most definitely not “Well, suck it up! It could be worse. Just look at Jesus, He had it really bad.” No, the point is: see the extent of Jesus love. He loved us to death. He endured for our sake. He didn’t have to come down in the form of a person and go to the Cross and bear our sin. He did that for us. He did that for love, so His love is undeniable. His love is a suffering love. Whatever He might have called or be calling you to go through, it is something He went through first, and that flows out of His sacrificial, substitutionary, suffering love. So, whenever you’re tempted to doubt God’s love in your trials, just look to the Cross. There we see the demonstration of the love of the Father and the love of the Son more clearly than anywhere else. In the Cross, we see God’s love is undeniable. God disciplines the one He loves. In fact, the writer will say in verse 8, **If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.** And we know this, don’t we? Intuitively, we get this; that parents who don’t discipline their children, who don’t train them, don’t educate them, don’t correct them, don’t love them. They’re not treating them as sons. Love is the foundation of discipline.

And so the backdrop of discipline is sonship, the model for discipline is Jesus, the Fountain of God’s discipline is His love. So what about the purpose? The purpose of God’s discipline is holiness.

When a parent flies off the rails and snaps at their children, the purpose of that outburst is peace and quiet. You know what it’s like, “Quit doing whatever you’re doing because it’s disturbing my peace. How can I enjoy myself if I always have to stop and correct you?” I know that line of dialogue all too well. That is not the purpose of God’s discipline. We can’t disturb His peace. So what’s the purpose? Verses 9–10: **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? 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.** We’ve all had earthly fathers, he says. Some good, others not so much; some present, others absent; some kind, others downright evil. And the writer is generalizing when he says, for the most part, **we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them.** Now that may not be true for everyone, that may not be true for you, but that is true for most. The challenge here is this: if you’ve had an abusive father, any talk of discipline can seem similarly abusive. But just recognize for a moment that there are good fathers. Not all fathers are good fathers, but there are good fathers. There are loving fathers, and they discipline their children for a time, as it seems best to them. It wasn’t always best, but they did what seemed best. At the time, and we honor them for that, even though they sometimes got it wrong. Why do we even earthly good earthly fathers sometimes get it wrong? Well, they’re sinners, just like anybody else; sometimes they will get it wrong because of sin. Second, they are finite; dads don’t

know everything; sometimes they get it wrong as a result. Consider then the Father of Spirits. We have earthly fathers who disciplined us for a time as it seemed best to them. But verse 10 says that God **disciplines us for our good**.

Now we live in such a relativistic age, we want to say, "Well, I decide what's good for me!" But we know (I think) that that only goes so far. In fact, the way of self-assertion tends to be the way of self-destruction. At some point, everyone must accept reality for what it is. Sometimes what is good though is not so clear. What do I do in this or that situation? What should I want? What should I seek out? What degree should I pursue? What vocation should I undertake? Whom should I marry? Who knows what is really good for me? If I must determine what is good for me, though, the weight of the world is on my shoulders. My destiny is in my hands, and that's a scary, scary thing. But truthfully, even when I don't know, God knows. He knows. He is omniscient, that means He knows everything. He knows what is good for me, even when I don't. Which means He can discipline me for my good. He can train me. He can instruct me. He can educate me in the ways I need, even if I don't realize it. He can be at work behind the scenes pursuing my good even when I'm not.

What is that good? Well, our writer tells us: it's holiness, sharing God's holiness. As Paul puts it in 1 Thessalonians 4: 3 **For this is the will of God, your sanctification**. Sanctification is the process of becoming holy. Holy means "different, set apart, distinct, not common, not ordinary." God is the only thing that is intrinsically holy. Creation, the created order with everything in it, Peach trees and people, llamas and light bulbs, grocery stores and governments, creation is common. God is not, He is holy. Creation is, by definition, mundane, ordinary. God is not, He is holy, glorious. Creation as it is now is also fallen, and people are sinful. God is not, He is holy, upright and good. God wants to lift us up out of the mundane and make us glorious, holy. God wants you to shine. That involves you being morally upright, yes, that's what we normally think of when we hear the word "holy," but it's more than that. It is being renewed in the whole person after the image of God. It is reflecting God's glory to the world. It is being set apart for a particular relationship intimacy with the Holy One. God wants us to share His holiness to be set apart with Him above creation. God wants to restore you to what you were always intended to be a reflection of His holy glory, His image in a mundane world. God want you to fulfill your purpose in life, to be all that you were meant to be, which is holy.

Verse 11 adds to this picture. Verse 11 says, **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**. Again, whether we are talking about the discipline of an athlete or a musician, the education of a student or the corrective discipline of a child, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant at the time. It's when we push ourselves, or those whom we love push us that we learn and grow. But that is hard. Nevertheless, the fruit of that is righteousness to those who have

been trained by it. Another word "trained" there is again from the athletic world. It's the Greek word from which we get the English word "gymnasium." How do we grow in righteousness? Well, God puts us through spring training. He puts us on a rigorous training schedule. He disciplines us. As Paul says, in 1 Timothy 4:7–8, **train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.** And so what is the purpose of God's discipline? Well, it's holiness, righteousness, godliness. God is shaping us as a coach shapes us an athlete. He is fashioning, informing us, remaking us in His image of righteousness and holiness, that we would shine forth His image to the world. Now, if God wanted us merely to be happy in the here and now, discipline wouldn't make sense. It's hard, it's painful, it's messy. But God wants us to be more than happy. He wants us to be holy, which is the only way we can be truly happy, not just here and now, but in and for eternity.

So the backdrop of discipline is sonship, the model of discipline is Jesus, the fountain of God's discipline is His love and the purpose of discipline is our holiness, which brings us to point five: the exhortation in the midst of discipline is to endure.

Now there are two errors to avoid when facing God's discipline. You see them in Proverbs 3, quoted in verse five, **My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.** Error number one is we dismiss what God is doing in our lives. The word "regard lightly" here means to regard something or someone as of little value, to look down on, to have contempt for, to make light of, to despise. God is doing something in your life. Do you regard that? I'm not asking if you understand it. I'm not asking if you know what it is. I cannot trace the mysterious Providence of God in my life. I can't tell you what God is teaching me right now. I might be able to look back five years from now and have some clue, but in the moment, I don't know what God is doing. But you do not have to know what God is doing to know that He is doing something and that everything that happens in your life is a part of that good plan. And so we despise God's plan when we regard it lightly, when we grumble, when we complain, when we rail against God, when we forge ahead with our own plans without taking God's Word into account or seeking His wisdom. We try to manipulate life to be what we want it to be. We are willing to sin to change our circumstances because we don't like what God is doing. When we do that, we are despising God plan. When we think there is no good option and we become cynical about life, we are despising God's good plan. The second error is growing weary. Our passage began by saying, "Consider Jesus, **so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.**" It's one thing to disregard God's plan or worse to grow bitter in light of it. It's another thing to grow weary. And you know what it means to grow weary: to tire to be worn out, to lose hope, to give up. And discipline is hard. How many aspiring athletes give up before they even make it to the field, not to mention before they win the Super Bowl or the World Cup? How many musicians give up before the audition, not to mention before the play or the recital? How many

students give up before they get the degree, not to mention before they make it in their chosen field? Hence the call of this passage: endure. Verse 3: **Consider him who endured**, verse 7: **It is for discipline [training, education] that you have to endure**, verse 11: **For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness**. Later, which means for now, you must endure.

And we can endure because Christ endured. We see Him **who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross** [Hebrews 12:2]. We endure for the holiness that verse 14 says, **without which no one will see the Lord**. We endure for the joy set before us, the joy of seeing our Father face to face, of entering his presence, our rest, the eternal home, the heavenly promised land, the city with foundations, the world to come, the new creation. So we endure, knowing that our Father out of His love for us is making us holy that we might dwell with Him. And He will finish His work. There is no uncertainty. There is no sense that God may or may not complete the disciplinary work that He began in us. The Psalmist says in Psalm 138, verse 8, **The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands**. Paul says in Philippians 1:6 **I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ**. Again, he says in 1 Thessalonians 5, **Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it** [1 Thessalonians 5:23–24]. God will make you holy. You don't have to make yourself holy, you don't have to sanctify yourself, you just have to endure. And even that, you don't have to do on your own. Jesus is with us. He has given us His Spirit and He has given us His church. And you rely on His power in the Spirit and His people in the church. Don't go it alone, and you will endure to the end.

So the backdrop of discipline is sonship, the model of discipline is Jesus, the fountain of discipline is God's love, the purpose of discipline is our holiness that we would see Him face to face, and the exhortation in discipline is to endure, looking to Jesus and relying on His Spirit.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we pray that you would give us a clear sight of Jesus, help us to consider Him, who endured such hostility, to see Him, the Son, who learned obedience through suffering, and help us Father to take up our cross and follow Him. It's in Jesus' name that we pray, amen.