

The Promise of Discipline

5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness.

11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb. 12:5-11)

Isn't it strange how those who experience the unpleasantness of child training from their parents turn out to be pleasant, while those who experience the pleasantness of never being corrected turn out to be so unpleasant? For that matter, it is interesting to find how unhappy are those children left to themselves, while how happy are those children whose parents gave them attention in the form of correction.

It's that phenomenon, on a much deeper and broader scale that this Scripture deals with. It's the security and comfort from God's parental correction. It's possible to misunderstand what God is doing, and instead of being that secure child, glad for the boundaries, you become insecure, unsure of why this is happening.

Many of the Hebrews who first received this letter were discouraged. They had endured great trials: their goods had been plundered, they had been mistreated, some imprisoned. For the name of Christ they now stood outside mainstream Jewish society, having lost their standing in the synagogue. Some may even have been priests who had lost their positions and livelihood at the Jerusalem temple. So while the writer was encouraging them to stay the course and run with endurance, they were experiencing weariness, and discouragement. They were wondering why things didn't get better, why the trial seemed to go on and on. Had God forsaken them? Was He punishing them?

That's the state of many Christians, perhaps ***. A trial can take its toll on your zeal, on your spiritual strength. Particularly when a trial goes on for an extended period. A health problem that seems to have no cure and no relief, a financial trial that seems to go on and on, a painful and difficult work situation, a relationship at home or elsewhere that seems like a thorn in your flesh, painful parenting experiences, painful losses, persecution from unbelievers. Crime, calamity, troubles, distresses, problems. If you don't approach these in the biblical manner, you can find yourself losing heart, running out of steam, wondering if you should keep going. You begin to question if God loves you, if He is angry with you.

The writer of Hebrews wants our courage to return, and gives us three encouragements about our trials as Christians. He has three exhortations that will change our perspective and experience of our trials if we take them to heart.

I. Painful Training Means We're Family

5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

“You have forgotten” is addressed to those who are weary and discouraged from verse 3. Those believers who are just so tired, so longing to stop and who feel it is all too hard, too difficult this is for them. If you are tired of striving, and feel like you are not even sure if you should go on, then the writer says *you have forgotten something*. Something has slipped from your view, and it is actually an exhortation. It's a command that will encourage you, and embolden you if you remember it.

What is it we have forgotten? Here it is in one sentence. For a Christian, pain means parenting.

The exhortation which his readers, and we also, may have forgotten, is Proverbs 3:11-12.

This text from Proverbs says simply, do not despise, which means *don't take lightly*, God's training, correction, discipline, rebuke, scourging. Parallel to *take lightly* is *detest*, which means be wearied, be irritated and tired of. What must we not take lightly or scorn or dismiss? The *chastening* of the Lord, the reproving or rebuking by the Lord. Chastening just means child-training. All that you do to rear a child to maturity. The second word, *correction*, means all that is done to convict us and expose our errors. God is at work rearing children, instructing positively, explaining, guiding, encouraging, and sometimes rebuking, warning, and correcting. That whole process is one in which God trains you.

As a Christian, your trials, your problems, your pains are part of a training process. They are deliberately chosen, carefully structured exams, tests and assignments in God's curriculum for your Christian life.

And they are hard. Training resists your natural inclinations towards laziness, self-indulgence, ease, comfort, and imposes upon a soul order. In our flesh we don't want order imposed upon us. We don't want disciplines, habits, schedules, practices, limits, plans, goals placed upon us. But without it, we are an uncultivated field. We will be a stallion that is never broken in.

Now why is this encouraging?

Because of verse 6, taken from Proverbs 3:12: 6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

If the Lord is child-training you, then it means He loves you. If the Lord scourges you, then it means He has included you in his family. *Scourges* is a strong word that means to whip, to beat with lashes. It is a spanking, a painful, an unpleasant act of correction. But God only spans His own children.

It is not a punishment of wrath and judgement. For a believer, the punishment of our sins was laid on Jesus the Son of God on the Cross. God will never punish His children for what Jesus was already punished for. Our crimes have been judged and punished on Calvary. What is being done now is loving correction.

Child-training is restricted to the family of God. Suffering is a worldwide phenomenon that includes all the fallen race of Adam. But trials that train are for God's children only.

Verses 7 and 8 make it plain:

7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

If your life is filled with training trials, God is acting towards you as a diligent and concerned parent. The writer asks a question which was easier to answer in the Roman world: what son is never disciplined by his father? In Roman culture, when this was written, there existed the *patria potestas*, the father's power. A father had by law absolute power over his family: he could bind or scourge his son, sell him into slavery, even have him executed. Well, in our world, awash as it is in self-esteem and narcissism and psychobabble, sadly many children are never disciplined by their parents. But in the Roman world which prized order and discipline, it was unthinkable that a parent would never correct or train his or her own child.

Children need correction, because foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him. Someone said that children are like canoes. He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly. (Prov. 13:24)

Negatively speaking verse 8 says, if you are without training, then God is not owning you as His own. If you are experiencing no training, then you are not experiencing parenting from God. If you are not experiencing parenting from God, then it is not that you are favoured child, it is that you are not a child at all. You might be hanging around the home, but you are not actually a child of the Father.

Perhaps you have wanted to discipline other people's children, but you don't have that relationship. I don't have the right, I don't have the relationship. I love them, but at a distance.

But if my children don't experience training from me, they ought to suffer some kind of insecurity. Why does my father ignore my actions? Why doesn't he tell me what is right and wrong? Doesn't he care if I harm myself? The pain of discipline, rightly administered communicates concern, love, sacrifice, and even willingness to include negative and unpleasant moments so as to reach the end-goal. Only the selfish parent refuses to discipline, because he or she is only concerned with being liked, keeping things fun, and keeping things going.

God is not like that. God trains His children very deliberately. God has no brats in His family. He has no spoilt children. God is not permissive and lazy with any of His children.

In other words, if you are living a worry-free life, you should actually be very worried. If you have a problem-free life, then you actually have the greatest problem of all. If your life has no troubles, you are in the worst trouble of all. If your life has no suffering, you are actually in the worst possible condition. You are without God. Jerome said, "The greatest anger of all is when God is no longer angry with us when we sin."

You have no family relationship with God. God might own you as His creation, but not as His son or daughter. You are still in the devil's family. Consequently, God doesn't train you. You are not His, so He does not work with you, train you, shape you. He is not preparing you to be a ruler and judge over angels, an inheritor of a kingdom, a king and priest. So there is no purifying, no painful lessons, no difficult tasks, nothing requiring severe tests of faith, profound sacrifice, an embrace of the Cross, humiliation and destruction of our pride, death to self. He does not need to smash your idols, and tear from your heart those false loves that you cherish.

That's why, as we read in Psalm 73, the wicked often prosper. This is their time, and it is their only time, and God lets them have some temporary pleasure on this Earth before it ends for an eternity.

But if you are experiencing the training of pain, then you are experiencing a Father lovingly and tenderly preparing His children to sit on thrones with Him, ruling the cosmos. He is taking selfish,

fearful, stingy sons of Adam, and shaping them into loving, courageous, glorious sons of God. It takes quite a bit of work to get a mule to look and act like a stallion, to get a poodle to act like a greyhound. But God is busy with a very long-term plan. The Bible describes it as taking us from one degree of glory to another.

are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Cor. 3:18)

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, (2 Cor. 4:17)

So when our hearts are drooping, and we are feeling discouraged, we must remember: only sons and daughters of God are trained. Here is hope, and assurance. There is a point to my pain. There is method in this difficulty. There is a planned result by an expert, perfect parent.

This is the first encouragement: the training of trials means we're in the family. Here comes a second.

II. Painful Training Is Already Familiar

9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness.

The second encouragement is: you are already used to training.

Here the writer is using something we call arguing from the lesser to the greater. Jesus used this technique when He said about us, "You, who are evil, know how to give your children good gifts. How much more will your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him (Matt 7:11).

So here he says, we have experienced human parenting. He knows that not everyone has had a father, but most have experienced some parenting, whether it was from a father, or a mother, or a grandparent. They corrected us, he says. This is familiar to us.

And indeed, not only were they human, but they were limited in their training. According to verse 10, they disciplined us for a few days, as seemed best to them. They only had us for a few years. They didn't know everything, they didn't see everything. They didn't always have the best motives. They weren't always perfectly unselfish in their discipline. Sometimes they did it for their own convenience.

These were human fathers, he says, and yet we paid them respect. We deferred to them. We had regard for their position. We did not treat them as mere pals or siblings. Instead, we gave them some kind of respect and submission. We made our beds, and came in when told to and picked up our clothes, and washed and brushed and submitted.

But now comes the comparison. God is the Father of Spirits. He is eternal, immortal. He sees everything, knows everything. He knows the best means to reach the best ends. He sees the future and knows exactly what He wants and how to achieve it. He can also perfectly see into our hearts and knows our motives and thoughts. His discipline, verse 10 is for our good: but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness.

The Father is not disciplining us because we are irritating Him and He wants us to stop. He wishes to make us partakers of His holiness. Sharers in His beauty, in the glorious character of God. He is

beautifying your character, sculpting it to be a unique replica of His own character. God's nature through your personality. He will train us and shape us, and unceasingly discipline us to get us to be those kinds of people.

So, the argument is: if we listened to our fallible, and sometimes selfish human parents, Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

If we could stop fighting and submit to faulty, limited human parents, how much more can we submit and endure perfect parenting from a God who chastens us for our good, 100% of the time? We already know imposed discipline. It is familiar to us. So why would we not keep accepting discipline, especially when it is from a perfect source?

Can you see why a lack of respect from children to parents, and a lack of submission from children to parents is so damaging to your relationship with God and your child's relationship with God? He is assuming certain things: parents who correct, and children who respect. When this no longer happens, the illustration breaks down. People no longer understand what chastening is like or why God would do it (because they are not doing it for their own children), and they don't understand what submission and respect to God is (because they never gave it nor do they require it).

Don't be weary and discouraged by training. You put up with it in your own parents. Indeed, you put up with it in every other sphere of life. You accepted having to go to school. You accepted the training of college or university or some course. You accepted the training for your sport, your hobby, your recreation. Now take that same patience, that same submission, that same acceptance of the cost and difficulty, and apply it to God's school of life.

So far two encouragements to the weary: if you are being trained, you are in the family. This is God calling you son or daughter. Rejoice! If you are being trained, you're already familiar with it, you're used to this. Don't murmur or be shocked, accept it like you accepted it in the rest of your life.

III. Painful Training Is Forming Us For Glory

11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb. 12:5-11)

Here's the third encouragement: there is gain from this pain.

Nothing about training is enjoyable while it is going on. It is painful. All training worth its salt contains some difficulty. Beware of those who tell you that learning is always supposed to be fun, and education must be fun, and learners must never find it painful or difficult. Doesn't sound like this Scripture.

Here we read that the present-tense experience of discipline is unpleasant on some level.

You only see the benefit when the training is in the past tense. That's why the next words are "nevertheless, **afterward** it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Training seems good to you once it is over and now in the past, bearing fruits in the present. And that means, while it is going on, you need to have a sense of the future: what this is going to bring about, if you go through with it.

You need to prune the rose bush if you want beautiful flowers later. You need to train your muscles and lungs till they burn if you want the fruit of lost fat and toned muscle and fitness. You need the training of mental discipline and hard study if you want the fruit of passed exams and career competence and sought-after skills and a salary. In the present, it is painful, but you keep the future

result in front of you to motivate you. Once it is done, that future fruit moves into the present, and the training moves into the past, and you are thankful you endured.

In this case, God's training produces the peaceable fruit of righteousness. What does that mean? Like the earlier phrase, partakers of His holiness, he is referring to practical righteousness. Not the imputed righteousness of Christ, but the lived, practical, experiential fruit of Christlikeness. He wants the sons and the daughters to look like the Son, so that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Let me break that down into five practical statements. What kind of gain comes after this pain? What sort of fruit of righteousness will grow after this pain?

First, He is training you to endure in your trust even in the absence of pleasant things.

2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (Jas. 1:2-4)

The pain of trials tests the quality of your faith and teaches you to keep trusting, even when the good things seem to disappear. It tests whether you are just using God as a means to your own ends, or whether He truly is the end, the ultimate treasure of your life. When God takes away the good and fun things, and our hearts still trust, He is teaching us endurance.

Second, He is training you to not make a Heaven out of Earth.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. (Col. 3:1-2)

God has a home for His children, and it is Heaven. This world is not our final home, because home is wherever the Father is. To turn a train station into a home is a profound mistake and a profound waste of time. So God trains us to remind us that this world is not where it all ends, and where it all is. When your trials cause you to look up and set your affections on things above and things future, the training is working.

Third, He is training you not to glory and boast in your privileges and gifts, but to use them wisely and humbly.

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. (2 Cor. 12:7)

God's children can find themselves developing a sense of entitlement. We can come to regard our blessings and privileges like rights, like needs that we can demand and expect. But God's children are to remember that all of life is grace. We deserve nothing except God's punishment, and everything better than that is a gift, a blessing. When God's training humbles you, and takes some of the arrogance and pride out of your attitude, the training is working.

Fourth, He is training you so you will know His comfort and be a comfort to others.

3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Cor. 1:3-4)

God puts us through pain so we can experience the blessing of His comfort. When we do, we become more compassionate towards the pain of others, and more able to be an instrument of compassion to others. When you become less self-centred, more moved by the suffering of others and desirous to identify, share, alleviate their suffering, the training is working.

Fifth, He is training you to be an object lesson of Christ and Calvary. He makes you an object lesson for others. 9 For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. (1 Cor. 4:9)

One of God's purposes for His children is that each of us become object lessons for others to study and learn from. He puts us through training, increasingly teaching us to act like Christ while He suffered. When you are suffering, and people are seeing it and being amazed by the different kind of responses coming out of you, the training is working.

This is the gain of the pain. Your faith endures more. You fix your eyes on Heaven. You drop the entitlement attitude and humble yourself. You begin to comfort others. You become a lesson for others to learn from.

“I don't know whether this is God's discipline. I don't understand it.” That's part of the training process. You are supposed to say, “What is this trial teaching me? What has this exposed about me? If I were responding to this trial like God's Word says I should, what about me would I be discarding, and what would I be including? What character traits are weak and needing more? If I were responding like Christ in this trial, what would I be exercising that is currently weak in me?”

Matthew Henry, “When we are chastened we must pray to be taught, and look into the [Word] as the best expositor of providence. It is not the chastening itself that does good, but the teaching that goes along with it and is the exposition of it.”

Why should I keep going? Because painful training means we're family. Because painful training is already familiar to us, it is more of the same, only better and perfect. Because painful training is actually gain: it's forming us for His glory.

In Heaven, there are no spoilt brats. Every single child has been trained. So we agree with with John Bunyan: “Let us learn like Christians to kiss the rod, and love it.”