

## Discipline

Those who do prison ministry know that a large percentage of male prisoners come from homes where the father was absent. Very often, the mother did all she could under the circumstances, but what was missing in the boy's life was a father. And when the father was missing, what was usually missing was a sense of discipline, boundaries, consequences, authority, and loving firmness. Lacking that, young men resort to laziness, rebellion, and then some kind of crime to support their warped view of how life works. Yes, there are plenty of exceptions, but there's also enough of a pattern to say that some of that discipline prevents a life of heartache.

In fact, I remember the account of the prisoner who cursed his mother who had come to visit him. In his rage, he blamed her for never having had the firmness to say no to him, to resist him, to re-direct him.

The kind of parent who wants her child to only like her is really profoundly selfish. In fact, Proverbs 13:24 says “He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.”

**Pro 29:15** The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

This is because the Bible describes man not as a good being needing minor adjustments. The Bible describes us as crooked beings needing complete redirection. Our crookedness comes from our greatness. We are made in God's image, and that means when you warp and twist a being like that, the potential for evil is massive.

The Bible teaches that God is not the passive parent, or the indifferent observer. He does intervene; He does exercise authority. For the Christian though, it is important to understand that God deals differently with His children than He does with those outside His family. Outside His family, God is the lawgiver and the judge. He deals like a magistrate, like a lawyer, like a policeman, like a jailer. And in God's government, Hell is not a “correctional facility”. It is a penal colony, a place of exile, of retribution, of justice.

But within His family, God deals with His children as a Father seeking to correct. The pain God brings into the lives of His children is not penal, but parental. It is entirely an act of training, of preservation, of instruction. God uses discipline to teach His children, to strengthen and harden them, to warn them. We make a great mistake when as believers we ask, “Why is God punishing me?” God has no reason to punish you, if He has punished His Son on your behalf on the Cross. What is coming to your life is the trial to refine you, and in some cases, the discipline to restore you. A. W. Tozer said, “God chastens us not that He may love us but because He loves us. In a well-ordered house a disobedient child may expect punishment; in the household of God no careless Christian can hope to escape it.”

That was the case in the life of David. David went into a period of wandering from God, of turning to his own devices, of embracing deceit and double-mindedness to make his life easier or save his own skin. But what we see in 1 Samuel 30 is the kind hand of God using the rod to chasten His beloved child, and restore him to faithfulness and fruitfulness. God corrects David with the pain of discipline, which is meant to drive him to the point of discipline, which will bring him to the great profit of discipline.

### I. The Pain of Discipline

**1 Samuel 30:1** Now it happened, when David and his men came to Ziklag, on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the South and Ziklag, attacked Ziklag and burned it with fire, <sup>2</sup> and had taken captive

the women and those who were there, from small to great; they did not kill anyone, but carried *them* away and went their way.

<sup>3</sup> So David and his men came to the city, and there it was, burned with fire; and their wives, their sons, and their daughters had been taken captive. <sup>4</sup> Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep.

<sup>5</sup> And David's two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite, had been taken captive. <sup>6</sup> Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. (1 Sam. 30:1-6 )

David and his men are sent back from the battlefield where king Achish had wanted David to fight against his own people, the Israelites. The Philistine princes were not willing to risk it, and David is sent back to Ziklag. He must have been massively relieved, and perhaps even felt that his dodging God and backsliding was working out for him.

But the relief changed in one heartbreaking moment. On the third day of travelling, David and his men finally sight Ziklag, where they are waiting for joyful reunions with their wives and children. But instead of the friendly smoke of chimneys and meals, they see the dark smoke of a destroyed town. The Amalekites, whom David had been raiding, had taken revenge on David and attacked his town.

Whether or not they had expected David and his men to be gone, we don't know. But for some reason, David had left none of the men to protect the women and children. When the Amalekites arrived, and found women and children, instead of slaughtering them (as David had been doing with the women and children in the towns he raided), they simply captured them as part of the booty of the town. They were no doubt able to completely pick the town clean of every thing of value, and then march the women and children off, almost certainly to sell them as slaves.

And then, to simply add malice to their spite, they set fire to the town. When David and his men came back, not only would they find their families gone, and all their wealth gone, they would have nothing to live in, only the charred remains of houses.

That's exactly the sight that greeted David and his men. A blackened, smouldering ruin, utterly silent except for the crackling of fires and the wind. No sound of children, no infants crying, no children playing, mothers calling, wives chatting, just the deathly silence of ruin.

These outlaws and fugitives probably had nothing they valued except their families. They had no stake in Israel, no farms, no identity there. Their lives in Israel were forfeit. Family was the one thing they lived for and fought for. Now they come back and they are gone. Not slaughtered, but taken, and who knows where. By now they could have been taken anywhere, at the mercy of their captors: being sold, or abused or tortured.

And now, David in his heart must know, that this is where his backsliding has finally brought him. His deceit, double-mindedness, and almost defection have resulted in the capture of all the women and children, and the destruction of their homes.

Matthew Henry wrote, "How David was corrected for being so forward to go with the Philistines against Israel. God showed him that he had better have stayed at home and looked after his own business. When we go abroad in the way of our duty we may comfortably hope that God will take care of our families in our absence, but not otherwise."

David has truly hit rock bottom. God has stripped David of everything: family, home, possessions, position, friends, respect, safety, direction. He has lost his position in Israel. He went over to the

other side, only to find that they do not trust him. Now the whole thing seems to have blown up in his face. He couldn't fight for Israel, he couldn't fight against Israel – rejected by Saul, rejected by the Philistines, sent home, only to find that other enemies have destroyed the last things they have been fighting for – their homes and families. David has no friend to comfort him, his wives are gone, no Samuel to turn to, no family.

But grief often turns to anger, bitterness, and blame. Some of David's men now speak of executing him. He is the one who led them to Philistia. He was the one flirting with king Achish, and led them off to battle. Maybe he was the one who said they should all go to the battle, and none should stay behind. Maybe they're reminded of the chances David had to kill Saul and hadn't done so. They were deeply bitter and ready to murder. These men who have been David's loyalists through seven years of fleeing from Saul, are now ready to put him to death.

David is reduced to nothing. This is the moment when suicide stares people in the face. They look at life and begin to think that the losses have outweighed the gains, and that one more sin will surely end the pain, and bring an escape.

Verse 6 says that David was greatly distressed. The word in the Hebrew means to be cramped, forced into a corner, in a tight spot. He is trapped, cornered, nowhere to go.

Well, he can go somewhere. He can turn inward, and hopeless, cast away hope, give in to despair, rage and blame others. Or he could turn upward. He could recognise that when you are in an impossible situation, and when the consequences of sin seem to have caught up, it is time to turn upward.

God's discipline is going to reveal to you what is in your heart, bringing out of you all the ugliness and evil you didn't think was there. And then you can continue to look inward and be depressed, or look sideward, and blame. But that will simply be the child in the spanking raging at the parent, blaming the sibling. The right response is to look upward.

## **II. The Point of Discipline**

But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.

Finally, after sixteen months of looking to his own devices, and believing his own voice, David repents. David has been far from God, and now at the end of himself, he admits as much.

He could not have strengthened himself or encouraged himself, unless he had first confessed his sin, and forsaken it. Had he not repented, he would have been encouraging himself in sin.

But kneeling in those ashes, with tears making streaks on his soot-covered face, David made right with God. He was not now only weeping for the loss of family and home, but for his long wandering away from God. Now David did what he had always done best: come back to God with integrity, and a true humility, and real spirituality.

Whether the men around him took up stones or not, whether this would end happily or not, David came back to His Lord. He strengthened himself in Yehovah his God. This is a very rare verb in Hebrew. It means that David took the initiative to be strengthened in God.

We might expect the text to say, “and David was strengthened by the Lord”. Or we might expect the wording to be more passive, David became strengthened, David received strength. But it does not

say that. The wording is emphatic. David (subject) strengthened (verb) himself (object) in the Lord (prepositional phrase). Who did the strengthening? David did. Who received the strengthening? David did. How did he do it? In the Lord his God.

David did not listen to himself, he preached to himself. He refused to heed the voices of despair and doubt and gloom and doom. Instead, he preached to himself. Learning to preach to yourself is one of the fundamental characteristics necessary to live a victorious Christian life. You need to address yourself, rebuke yourself if necessary, question yourself, and tell yourself what to do on the basis of the Word of God. Those who listen to the various thoughts floating around their heads will inevitably be discouraged.

But notice that David was strengthened in the LORD his God. He came back to meditating on his God, on God's nature, and on God's works. The heart of David's recovery was that he began to think, "God is like this in His nature. He is *my* God. I am in a relationship with Him. Therefore, this is going to work out for His glory and my joy. My problems are part of His plan."

David began to think about who his God was, and that was enough as far as the situation went. He did not need full assurance of *how* it would work out, it was enough that His God was the faithful God He had always been.

Every believer can do this. To be encouraged in the Lord our God means to think prayerfully on God in His Word. There we find that in Jesus Christ, God is continually for His children. God will not allow anything to separate us from His love. God is working everything together for our good. God will never leave us nor forsake us. God did not spare His own Son and gave Him up for us, and so will with Him freely give us all things. God will regard every promise toward us in Jesus Christ as 'yes' and "Amen". We can interpret our circumstances through God's promises.

Now David did something more. As he came back to the grace of God, he got up, refused to dwell in self-pity or unbelief, and looked for the next obedient response.

<sup>7</sup> Then David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, "Please bring the ephod here to me." And Abiathar brought the ephod to David. <sup>8</sup> So David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?" And He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake *them* and without fail recover *all*."

Here is a stark contrast to Saul seeking guidance from the witch at Endor. David gets the ephod, which held the Urim and the Thummim. In other words, David is now seeking the will of God. The first thing on his mind is now obedience. What does God want me to do? David's will brought him to this place of ruin; now he wants God's will. He wants nothing except God's guidance.

David asks the High Priest to ask God if he should go on a pursuit of the Amalekites. From the ephod, David is told to pursue them, and he receives an assurance of success.

<sup>9</sup> So David went, he and the six hundred men who *were* with him, and came to the Brook Besor, where those stayed who were left behind. <sup>10</sup> But David pursued, he and four hundred men; for two hundred stayed *behind*, who were so weary that they could not cross the Brook Besor. <sup>11</sup> Then they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David; and they gave him bread and he ate, and they let him drink water.

<sup>12</sup> And they gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. So when he had eaten, his strength came back to him; for he had eaten no bread nor drunk water for three days and three nights.

<sup>13</sup> Then David said to him, "To whom do you *belong*, and where *are* you from?" And he said, "I *am* a young man from Egypt, servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind, because three days ago I fell sick.

<sup>14</sup> "We made an invasion of the southern *area* of the Cherethites, in the *territory* which *belongs* to Judah, and of the southern *area* of Caleb; and we burned Ziklag with fire." <sup>15</sup> And David said to him, "Can you take me down to this troop?" So he said, "Swear to me by God that you will neither kill me nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will take you down to this troop."

<sup>16</sup> And when he had brought him down, there they were, spread out over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil which they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. <sup>17</sup> Then David attacked them from twilight until the evening of the next day. Not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode on camels and fled. (1 Sam. 30:6-17)

Pursuing people who are two days ahead of you means running for hours on end. Eventually, at least 200 of David's men simply cannot keep up the pace, and David has them stay where they are with the supplies. The remaining 400 find an Egyptian slave of the Amalekites left for dead after he fell sick. He is their best lead as to where to find the Amalekites, so David's men do their best to revive him, and coax him to lead them. After promising not to harm him, he leads them to the Amalekite camp.

With stealth, David's men can see that the Amalekites have camped and are having a drunken victory party. They are eating, drinking, and dancing, cavorting around and just gorging on the spoils they've obtained from robbing Philistine towns while the Philistines are at war.

David and his men wait for the early morning twilight, and then attack. This is probably a group of over 1000, but many are probably drunk, asleep, or have hangovers from their overindulgence. The battle still goes on for many hours. He defeats them completely, with the exception of 400 who escape on camels, which means the original group must have been well over 1000.

Now consider how the pain of God's discipline, which had the point of restoring David, now brings profit.

### **III. The Profit of Discipline**

Here we can see the good results of God's discipline on David.

So David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away, and David rescued his two wives. <sup>19</sup> And nothing of theirs was lacking, either small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything which they had taken from them; David recovered all. <sup>20</sup> Then David took all the flocks and herds they had driven before those *other* livestock, and said, "This *is* David's spoil."

First, David gains back their loved ones and their possessions. In fact, they come back with more, far more than they can handle or live with on their own. God is kind, and when the discipline is over, like with Job, He often restores back far more than He took away. The great difference between God's discipline and an attack by Satan, is that God's discipline never leaves you worse off spiritually and emotionally, if you respond rightly to it.

<sup>11</sup> 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. 12:11)

Second result:

<sup>21</sup> Now David came to the two hundred men who had been so weary that they could not follow David, whom they also had made to stay at the Brook Besor. So they went out to meet David and to meet the people who *were* with him. And when David came near the people, he greeted them.

<sup>22</sup> Then all the wicked and worthless men of those who went with David answered and said, "Because they did not go with us, we will not give them *any* of the spoil that we have recovered, except for every man's wife and children, that they may lead *them* away and depart."

<sup>23</sup> But David said, "My brethren, you shall not do so with what the LORD has given us, who has preserved us and delivered into our hand the troop that came against us.

<sup>24</sup> "For who will heed you in this matter? But as his part *is* who goes down to the battle, so *shall* his part *be* who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike."

<sup>25</sup> So it was, from that day forward; he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day.

Second profitable result: David is gracious. Some of the men who had the endurance and strength to make it to the battlefield resent those who didn't have the strength. And they want those men to go without. "They haven't "earned it" the way we have", they think. The Bible calls these men wicked and worthless – that's what God thinks of legalists and people without grace.

But when you have been disciplined by the Lord, you are gracious. You know that it was love that disciplined you. You realise that your own success has been by grace. In verse 23, David is not using the words "my spoil". David says, "this is what Yhvh has given us; He preserved us; He defeated the enemy for us. How then could we be proud, unthankful and ungracious to our weaker brethren?" David is not just leading his men, but teaching them. He is teaching them that in God's plan, we all have different responsibilities, but everything is by grace. In the New Testament, Paul is going to say it this way:

<sup>7</sup> So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. <sup>8</sup> Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. (1 Cor. 3:7-8 )

Here is the third result of the discipline upon David.

<sup>26</sup> Now when David came to Ziklag, he sent *some* of the spoil to the elders of Judah, to his friends, saying, "Here is a present for you from the spoil of the enemies of the LORD"-- <sup>27</sup> to *those who were* in Bethel, *those who were* in Ramoth of the South, *those who were* in Jattir, <sup>28</sup> *those who were* in Aroer, *those who were* in Siphmoth, *those who were* in Eshtemoa, <sup>29</sup> *those who were* in Rachal, *those who were* in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, *those who were* in the cities of the Kenites, <sup>30</sup> *those who were* in Hormah, *those who were* in Chorashan, *those who were* in Athach, <sup>31</sup> *those who were* in Hebron, and to all the places where David himself and his men were accustomed to rove. (1 Sam. 30:26-31)

Third profit of the discipline: David is generous. He comes back to Ziklag. He sends gifts to the various families, leaders and friends in Judah, those who had supported him. From one point of view, this is a good political move. When Saul is no longer king, the first people who will acknowledge David as king will be his own tribe, the tribe of Judah. It is wise to send them thank-you gifts for sheltering him all that time, and keep the relationship a good one. But more broadly, this is just sheer generosity. David could hoard all the extra goods and animals they've obtained, but he won't do that. He's ready to share, and bless, and fill others with joy.

A third result of discipline is generosity. You have a bigger heart, more compassion for others. Your focus is broken off your self-centredness and moves to the glory of God and the good of others. You realise God was generous with you, merciful, patient.

When discipline does its work, you gain, sometimes gaining back the things you temporarily lost. But even if not, you gain spiritual growth, maturity, and Christlikeness which is better than life. When discipline does its work, you are gracious. You are aware of grace: grace saved you, grace preserved you, grace rebuked you and grace restored you. So one of the signs that discipline has done its work is that you are no longer in the harsh, critical, judgemental stance of those who are still measuring themselves and others by external conformity to some standard. And third, when discipline has done its work, you are generous. Generous with your time. Generous with kindness and praise. Generous with your money. Generous with blessing.

It is a high privilege to be disciplined by God. John Owen once said, "There is no chastisement in heaven, nor in hell. Not in heaven, because there is no sin; not in hell, because there is no amendment. Chastisement is a companion of them that are in the way, and of them only."

If you are not in Christ, then remember those young men today in the prison cells. Their independence, their wilfulness, their arrogance, unguided and unhindered by a fatherly hand put them in an earthly prison. Would you risk an eternal prison simply to be your own boss? God calls you to be his son. "As many as received Christ, to them He gives the authority to be called children of God, even to those who believe on His name." God will perfectly father you.

To be disciplined by God is to be owned by him. If you are in Christ, you have repented of sin and embraced the person and work of Jesus, then thank God for the bruises, and stripes and the wounds from God. Whom the Lord loves, He chastens. His love letters often come in black envelopes. Spurgeon said, "It were better to smart till one were black and blue under the rod of God, than to be set upon a high throne by the world or the devil."

If your heart is drooping, and you ask, when will it be done, consider, If your child came to you and said, "Father, mother, thank you for the rod, I know it has been for my good" you would certainly know it was time to be finished correcting him. So it was with David, and so it will be with us.