

When God Disciplines • Proverbs 3:11

Do you remember the last time you got a good hard spanking? For some it was 70 years ago; for others it was less than 70 minutes ago! For some of us we have tried to wipe out those memories and forget them.

As I reflect back on my childhood and the spankings I got there is only one experience I can remember although I am sure there were far more that I have forgotten. We were on a family vacation driving from metropolitan New York to Florida. It was in the days before the interstate highways and the trip was long and tiresome. My brother and I added to my parents' torture on that journey. My father would last for about 300 miles and then he would take off his belt as he drove down the highway and would swing back and whoever got hit probably deserved it. And I learned some lessons. I learned, first of all, that the place to sit was not behind him. I also learned that when you see him reaching for his belt, hit the floor and let your brother get it because there was no place for him to go.

For those who have not been spanked in a very long time, let me ask a second question: Does the lack of recent spankings mean that you have not deserved or needed one? Would you be a better person if you had been spanked?

Your reply may be, "I would just like to see someone try to spank me! I would call the police and slap a lawsuit on them faster than you can say 'Perry Mason'." But then you add, "Honestly? There have been lots of times I deserved a spanking, even as an adult. Sort of like when I was a kid and my dad caught me doing something wrong. I hated it then, but I realize now that he really loved me and wanted the best for me. He wanted to put my life in line. Sure, there have been many times since then when my life has been pretty far out of line and a good old-

fashioned spanking would probably have done me a lot of good and saved me a lot of grief."

We still have a Father who loves us enough to discipline us! He is our heavenly Father. He does not discipline us with a belt or a stick or his hand, but he does still discipline us. He uses circumstances, difficulties, unemployment, illnesses, conflicts, defeats and challenges.

There is no doubt that God disciplines us, but the question is: how do we respond? You see, in order to benefit from the discipline of our heavenly Father we must develop a right perspective and decide how we are going to respond to the discipline God gives us.

Let's take a look at God's perspective on discipline. God wants us to be winners. God sees life as like a race. He is our coach. He is determined to make us into winners. And he has bet everything on our winning. That is what is talked about in Hebrews 12:1-2:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix

our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

God wants us to win. This truth is throughout the Bible and is basic to our perspective on life. Never think that God is our enemy. He never pulls against us. He is always on our side doing everything possible to make our lives good. When we understand this basic powerful truth it determines our view of everything in life. Never forget it!

But we must also realize that God uses discipline to make us into winners. In Hebrews 12:3-11 the author tells us:

If God does not discipline you, you must begin to wonder if you are his and the object of his special love

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

All winners have been disciplined. They have been disciplined to get up early, to eat the right food, to exercise until they are exhausted, to practice until they are perfect. They have been deprived of things others have and have been shouted down when they did wrong. Discipline is essential to win. Only losers get by without discipline!

God uses many disciplines on us. For example, God has given to us guidelines about relationships, the food we eat, the beverages we drink and how we spend our money and time. These are the training rules of winners in the race of life. But he also corrects us when we are out of line. To do that God uses people and things in our lives to shape and direct us to be the way we should be to win.

God’s discipline demonstrates his love. God is big on this point. It is written several times in the Bible, but specifically in Hebrews 12:6: *“The Lord disciplines those loves.”*

Do you know whose children I discipline? I discipline my own children because I love them and want them to do what is right. Do you know whose children’s grammar I correct? I correct my own children’s grammar. Do you know whose children I insist do their homework no matter what? Mine. I want my children to be winners because I love them with all my heart! It is not that I don’t care about your children, but I don’t love them the way I love my own children. Therefore, I do not discipline your children.

When God disciplines you, do not think it is from lack of love! To the contrary! If God does not discipline you, you must begin to wonder if you are his and the object of his special love. *“The Lord disciplines those he loves.”*

Several years ago I heard a fascinating technical definition of polish. It is a series of parallel scratches. So, if you polish a piece of wood, a precious stone or the surface of your car you are really scratching it into a brilliant reflective pattern.

That is kind of what God does with us. God scratches us with the disciplines of life until we are brilliantly polished winners who perfectly reflect Jesus Christ. It hurts when God rubs us so that the lines of our lives go a different direction than they have been going. But God does this because he loves us. We are his and he wants us to brilliantly reflect his Son.

This biblical and correct perspective on divine discipline will put any Christian into position for the right response to discipline. God wants us to be winners. God uses discipline to make us winners. And when he disciplines us it proves that he loves us.

The next question, which is a practical one instead of a radical one, is: What is my response to discipline? That brings us to Proverbs 3:11 which is also quoted in Hebrews 12:5, *“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you.”* *“Do not make light of the Lord’s discipline”* means

do not resist the discipline of God. The reason for this counsel is obvious. Many people fight discipline and therefore fail to gain the benefit from it.

Suppose God chooses to discipline through loss. Perhaps you have never learned to fully rely on the Lord. God sees a need in your life for full trust so he allows circumstances to enter your life where you lose your job or a cherished relationship and through this you learn to trust him and see him provide. But, suppose you resist! You resent what God is doing. You blame God for your problems. You quit praying and going to church. Instead of benefiting from discipline you are worse off than before.

Sometimes God disciplines us through the church. The New Testament requires church discipline. Perhaps there is something out of line in your life and a fellow believer from the body of Christ comes to you and points it out. How do you respond? If the church spiritual leaders discipline you in order to help order your life do you benefit and respond by making changes in your life or do you get mad, leave the church and go elsewhere?

Suppose you don't know if what happens is divine discipline or not? Ask God to tell you. Our heavenly Father wants us to know. He will most often point out the purpose of his discipline so that it will help. Expect God to use all that happens to shape your life for good. That is the teaching of Romans 8:28 that tells us, “. . . *we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.*” So, don't resist. “*My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline!*”

As the father of four children I know well that fathers who discipline their children want the point to be made very clearly. The discipline is never independent of instruction. And so it is safe to assume that a God who disciplines us is always anxious to let us know the purpose and point of the discipline he gives. All we need to do is ask him.

Do not become weary and run away before God has time to get the job done!

Hebrews 12:5 continues, “. . . *do not lose heart when he rebukes you.*” This means we should not get fed up with God's repeated corrections to the point that we run away from them.

We have some very crooked Russian Olive trees in our backyard. In the first place, this is a genetic problem with Russian Olives. They seldom grow up like an oak tree. So, should I go out back, chop off a few stray limbs and then straighten up the main trunk? I tried it. It went right back to where it was

as soon as I walked away! You see, the only way to straighten out a naturally crooked Russian Olive tree is to rope it and stake it for a very long time.

People are even harder to straighten out! We are born with a natural inclination to grow in wrong directions. God may chop off a few branches (which hurts!) and then give us a disciplinary push in the right direction but we often snap back to the way we were. So, God must rope us and stake us for the long haul in order to get us growing in the right direction.

Don't run away! Don't grow weary! Remember that God is disciplining us for the long haul because he loves us and wants us to be winners! Persevere! Hang in there! That is not too popular in our generation of instant cures but it is essential to become what we ought to be. Hang in there long enough for God to perfect your marriage. Persevere to allow God to do his special work in your family. Give God time to shape and direct your life, your church, your character, your emotions—your everything! Do not become weary and run away before God has time to get the job done!

The apostle Paul tells his own experience in 2 Corinthians 12. God saw that Paul had a potential problem with pride, so the Lord gave him a physical handicap (the Bible refers to it as his “*thorn in the flesh*”) to keep him humble. Paul prayed repeatedly to be cured and God repeatedly said “no”. Paul did not quit; he did not run

away; he did not give up. He submitted to the discipline from God that enabled him to grow straight and become a winner.

Have you been tempted to resist God's discipline? Are you ready to run? Don't do it! God loves you and is working hard to shape you and make you into a winner!

J. Oswald Sanders put all of this in a way that I just love. He wrote:

When God wants to drill a man
And thrill a man
And skill a man,
When God wants to mold a man
To play the noblest part;
When he yearns with all His heart
To create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch His methods, watch His ways!
How He ruthlessly perfects
Whom He royally elects!
How He hammers him and hurts him,
Into trial shapes of clay which
Only God understands;
While his tortured heart is crying
And he lifts beseeching hands!
How He bends but never breaks
When his good He undertakes;

How He uses whom He chooses
And with every purpose fuses him;
By every act induces him
To try his splendor out - - -
God knows what He's about!

Yes, in your life, "God knows what He's about . . . ! Therefore, *"My son, (my daughter), do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lost heart when he rebukes you."*

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