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'Things God Loves' Series
#3

“God Loves Those
Whom He Disciplines”
Hebrews 12

Introduction

In our series on *Things God Loves*, we come to one of those curious topics today – God loves discipline – or He loves to discipline – or He loves those He disciplines. No matter how you say it, all of these things are true. But it's I say it's curious because as the recipient of that discipline, we sometimes have trouble believing that discipline is a good thing and that it is something God would love.

It's a little like the child believing his father who is about to spank him and first says *Son, this is going to hurt me a lot more than it does you*. No child alive has understood that statement! Not until you become a parent and are about to administer your first spanking can you really understand what dear ole' dad meant.

So today we want to explore the good nature of discipline. And here's the point; God loves you so much that He will discipline you in order that you share in His holiness. Without discipline you will fall into and remain in your sin. It is the discipline of the Lord that brings us to repentance and trains us in righteousness.

[Hebrews 12]

The writer of Hebrews likens the Christian life to running a marathon. It is a long race that requires endurance and perseverance. It is not an easy road to navigate. There are pitfalls and discouragements and temptation to quit all along the way. And so, we are encouraged and admonished in these opening verses to listen to the witness of the faithful saints who have gone before us so that our hope might be bolstered – because they have run the same race with success. We are challenged to lay aside sin which will surely encumber us and make our race impossible. And we are exhorted to fix our eyes upon Christ, not so much that we can imitate Him – but so that we might remember and see that He did it for us. This will keep us from growing weary and losing heart.

We have a problem. We don't hate sin near enough. Jesus hated it enough to shed his own blood for our sin. But seemingly, we are all too happy to live in our sin, to compromise God's standard of righteousness, and to be content with a small semblance of holiness.

And so to help us, God disciplines those whom He loves. What is discipline? The word has lots of different nuances. We use it in lots of different ways.

- If you stick to your diet and don't eat that piece of cake – you are disciplined.
- If you run an orderly life – do the things you should do – have a quiet time, do your homework, exercise, eat well, clean the house – you are disciplined.
- We also talk about areas of academic work as *disciplines*, because to become an expert in a field you have to submit to the rigors of study

- Discipline is also a form of correction and rebuke where consequences for behavior are imposed to bring conformity.

So the word has a lot of subtle differences, from instruction (Acts 7:22 says Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians – the word educated is the same word for discipline here), to severe correction (I Timothy 1:20 Paul hands over Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan so that they might be taught or disciplined so that they won't blaspheme).

Discipline always has some form of discomfort or pain to it because we are forcing ourselves or being forced to put off something unwanted and putting on something desirable. I'm reminded of this every day I get on the treadmill or elliptical machine at the place I exercise. I don't enjoy it, but I enjoy the result of it. Discipline hurts, but it is good. Is it any wonder that discipline seems to increasingly be a thing of the past in our culture because the axiom of the day is to escape pain and discomfort at all costs. A generation ago the motto was *no pain no gain*. Now it seems we have reduced it to two words, *No pain*.

The writer of this book makes it clear in verse 10 that the goal of discipline from God's perspective is so that good things will come to us – namely that we should grow in holiness. So we could define discipline like this: *The application of instruction, correction, or consequences for our own good so that we will grow in holiness.*

Now, to help us overcome our reluctance for discipline the writer here preaches to us from Proverbs 3:11-12 (vs. 5 – 6 in our text). (Read) And He quotes from this text because he knows that our knee jerk reaction will always be to reject discipline—especially the kind of discipline that is imposed upon

us from someone else. And if you'll notice what the Word says here, you'll see that there are two opposite and extreme reactions to discipline that we need to watch out for.

1. Regard it lightly.

Since we don't like to be corrected or to have pain brought into our lives we are often likely to simply dismiss discipline as though it were no big deal. We will either reject the problem as it's presented to us (Oh, it's not that big a deal, I don't really have a problem), or we reject the solution (that's too hard, or that won't work, or too costly), or we reject the messenger (who do you think you are telling me what to do?)

In each case we find excuses and reasons to reject or despise the discipline because we regard it too lightly – we don't take it seriously.

2. Faint at the sight of discipline.

The word faint here is also translated to lose heart, grow weary or be discouraged by the discipline. We are warned here about throwing in the towel and giving up because of discipline. We may know the need is real and the sin and struggles and weaknesses of our life are crippling, but rather than persevering and running the race with endurance and submitting to necessary disciplines we adopt an attitude that simply is unwilling to make change.

The word faint literally means to let loose of or to release. This is what Job's wife counseled Job to do in the face of his troubles. Job 2:9 Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!"

Listen, God has a better plan for you. You may be facing significant discouragements. You don't want to study, to work, to diet, to submit, to listen, etc. But God gives you a promise. If you will

endure discipline, afterwards comes the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

So how does God bring us discipline? What kinds of discipline does He use? Let's talk about 3 different ways that discipline can come into our life.

1. Inner discipline.

You might call this a *willing discipline or voluntary discipline*, although I want to be clear that we're not talking about something outside of God's grace as though it originates from us. All of the disciplines we're talking about here are by God's grace. But you must understand that God commands you to take responsibility for your life. Every time He issues you a command, He expects you to discipline yourself to obedience.

Some of you men have read the book by R. Kent Hughes called *Disciplines of a Godly Man*. His wife wrote a similar book for women. The books pick up the theme that Paul lays out in I Corinthians 9 when he says *Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified*. The title says it all. Godliness requires discipline.

The easiest and the best disciplines are the ones we bring to ourselves. It starts with your pursuit of Christ. A godly man or woman learns the priority of prayer and worship and fellowship with God. Those disciplines give him the power to be disciplined and faithful in all of life. How easy is it to get caught up in an undisciplined lifestyle? Some of you are battling it right now. You're not doing what you ought to be doing. You're not in the right place at the right time. You're not with the right people. You're not faithful to the responsibilities God has laid at your feet.

But you still have the opportunity for self-discipline. You can confess your sin to God. Repent of your ungodly behavior and put yourself under discipline.

If you don't then you'll face the second kind of discipline:

2. External Discipline

Paul uses the example of fathers to teach us about this. Look at verses 9 & 10 (read). As we will see later in our evening study of the 10 Commandments, our fathers and mothers represent various authorities in our lives. God tells us three things about the discipline of external authorities.

- God uses them to train us to respond to God. Kids, when your parents discipline you – spank you; send you to your room, remove a privilege from you, one of the things you need to realize is that they are teaching you about God. They are showing you that you will one day have to answer to God. There are consequences for your sin. You need to learn to do what is right, confess your sin when you are wrong, and change your behavior to please your parents because God gave them to you to teach you to obey Him.
- Your parents do what they think is best. *As seems best to them.* Your parents are not perfect. They will make mistakes. They will learn things from God too. So you need to understand that your obedience to them is not based on whether you agree with them or not. God chose your parents and put them in authority over you. You must obey them because that's what God asks you to do.

- You should strive to respect your parents. Verse 9 indicates that this is what is normal and required. Remember that discipline, even imperfect discipline, is for your good and will help you to live a life that pleases God.

Here's the point. If you can't discipline yourself, someone else will bring discipline to you. It might be a teacher, the dean of the university, a boss, a coach or a judge. Verse 11 teaches us that *all discipline* is useful to help us grow in holiness.

3. Heavenly Discipline

This final kind of discipline is the kind that comes straight from the hand of God. When we won't discipline ourselves; when we ignore the discipline of others; then God still brings discipline because He loves us. It can come in various forms.

- a. Acts of God's providence. (Psalm 80 this morning.)

Ask Jonah about the discipline of the Lord. God can use specific events in our lives – either directed at us personally or of a more general nature to teach us to live for Him. Jesus taught this lesson by commenting on a current event in His day. In Luke 13 we read *do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*

If you lose a job, flunk a test, have a fight with your wife, can't pay a bill . . . or whatever, you would do well to ask the Lord to teach you how to live for Him. As Christians we know that nothing is random and by chance. That doesn't mean everything bad that comes into your life is God telling you that you are living in sin. But providence is a great teacher that disciplines us to live for God.

- b. Work of the Holy Spirit to convict.

One of the greatest disciplines God brings to His children is the personal chastisement of the Holy Spirit. What we call a guilty conscience is often the Holy Spirit convicting us – smiting us – for our sin. Go back and read again Psalm 32, 38 and 51. See the effect of the Spirit of God upon David before He confessed His sin.

c. Discipline of the Church

It's been a difficult year in the life of our congregation. I can't think of year where we have had more formal discipline cases than this year. And yet we practice church discipline, not because we enjoy it, but because we believe it is one of the means God has given to bring holiness and repentance to His people. Matthew 18 gives the process of dealing with sin. *If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.*

Church discipline is not rightly viewed as the decision of a few men – but rather as the work of God. It is designed to call God's people to repentance and holiness. (Kinds and types of discipline: admonish, rebuke, suspension and excommunication.)

Well, that's a lot to digest in one morning. I want to urge you to reread the last part of this chapter. At the end we are reminded of two places we can dwell. We can live on Mt Sinai - the place of the law. If our life is undisciplined and we persist in

sin, we will meet there a fearful, consuming God and the consequences will be devastating. Or we can live on Mt. Zion where we will find the city of the living God and the angels and the people of God living at peace with Jesus who is the forgiver of their sins.

I urge you today, to fix your eyes on Jesus.

Remember what He has done for you – how He despised the shame and endured the cross so that you might not grow weary and lose heart. Jesus has done everything for you. Abide in Him and He will give you the grace you need to live a disciplined life.