

Discipline & Encouragement to Walk in the Lord (Hebrews 12:4-17)

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[0:00] Amen. Amen. You may be seated. Children, we are ready for Children's Church at this time.! You may make your way to the back. And remember, this week you're going to be going to the youth! You're going to be making your way to the youth room for Children's Church. And so parents, make sure that when you pick them up, you go out and to the right to pick up your kids after the service. Now, this story is a little bit before my time, but I've seen some documentaries and read the story. But who in here can remember the 1980 Olympics when the U.S. hockey team beat the Russians? Anybody can anybody remember watching that? Yes, many of you can remember seeing that. And it's a really a fascinating story. The United States had put together a group of college hockey players who were going to represent the U.S. in the Winter Olympics. Now, this was before professional athletes could play. And so they were getting all of these college athletes from around the country, bringing them together to represent the United States in the hockey tournament there. And so this group of hockey players, this group of college students, was set to play what was undoubtedly the greatest team in the tournament, the Soviet Union. They were going to play them. And they were set to play them. And just from a strictly statistical standpoint, they had very little chance of winning this game. Very little chance of walking away from this victorious. But Coach Herb Brooks gave a speech to his team. And he said, great moments are born from great opportunity. And that is what you've earned here tonight. He said, one game. He said, if we played them 10 times, they may beat us nine of those times.

But not this game. Not tonight. I don't even like hockey. But I'm like, let's go play. You know, let's, that's exciting. That's a, that's a powerful speech, a powerful statement. No one expected them to win.

But with about a minute left, the commentator said, do you believe in miracles? Do you believe in miracles? And the U.S. team pulled off one of the greatest upsets in sports history. Now, was all of this through just sheer blind, dumb luck that, that the team managed to pull this off? Of course not. It wasn't just that.

A lot of it came down to the coach. Herb Brooks, who knew that he didn't have the best team in the world. They were not the most talented team in the world. But he said, no one's going to outwork us.

No one is going to outwork us. And they would be the most disciplined team. His philosophy was pretty simple. He said, we may not have the best team, but we will be the fittest team.

[3:02] And one of the reasons that the U.S. beat the Russians in this is because they never stopped. They never stopped skating. They never stopped with this level of intensity throughout the game that was hard to keep up with for the entirety of the game. And they were able to do this.

In our next section in the book of Hebrews that we're going to be looking at, the author explains how hard work and training not only pays off in the sports arena, but also in the Christian life. And so if you have a copy of God's Word, I want to invite you to open with me as we begin to think about what it means to be disciplined followers of Christ. And so Hebrews chapter 12, starting in verse 4, and you'll remember from our previous section, the author is telling us to run this race that God has set for us. He's saying we must run it with endurance. We must run it as we look to Jesus. And now we begin to see how we are to train for this race.

It says this, starting in verse 4, Hebrews 12, it says, In your struggle against sin, you have not resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard 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? 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.

[5:07] 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. Therefore, lift your drooping hands and straighten your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.

That no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought for it with tears. In this passage, the author points to us, is trying to tell us, the point he's trying to tell us is that in order to run this race that God has called us to run, in order to run it well, in order to run it with endurance, we must run with discipline.

And it's my hope and prayer that as we look at this passage, we will clearly see the need to be disciplined in the Christian walk. Now, in order for us to see this, I want us to answer a question that I think this text asks of us. I want us to answer this question and then to see a few truths that build from this passage. And so to begin with, I want us to answer the question very simply, what is discipline? What is discipline? Just verses 4 through 11, we see the word discipline or disciplined appear nine times. Now, in addition to this repetition of the word discipline, the whole theme of this section is talking about being disciplined in our walk with God. That is the focus of this passage. But let's be honest here. Very few people like the word discipline, or rather I should say very few people like to be disciplined. We tend to think of discipline as a negative thing, whereas something like training, that's positive, right? We don't like to think about discipline or being disciplined, but training, yeah, that's okay. We're okay with that. But in reality, what we see in this passage is that the two of them go hand in hand. In fact, I would say that discipline is the process in which God shapes us to be best used by Him. I would say that discipline is the process in which God shapes us to be best used by Him. Sometimes this discipline looks very corrective. It looks very corrective. There are consequences for sin in our lives. Now, this is not saying that our sin is bringing about God's wrath or His punishment on us because as believers, we believe that when Jesus went to the cross, He took the full weight of God's wrath and punishment for us, but He also, He does discipline us. And part of His shaping is this corrective discipline.

And so when we think of discipline, this is almost always where our mind goes, is corrective discipline. Consequences set out to correct a negative behavior. And this is what comes to mind when we think of the word discipline. But I also want you to think of what comes to mind when you think of a child who is disciplined. When you think of a disciplined child, what are those characteristics? You think of a child that not only was corrected when they did something wrong, but you also think of a child who was trained, who was taught, who was informed in what they were supposed to do. The discipline was not only reactive, but it was also proactive. Any good discipline in training understands this. And the author, he loves to use sports analogies here. So let's just go along with those sports analogies. A coach who at least has a basic understanding of what it means to train athletes, understands that discipline involves correcting a wrong behavior. But also, even more so, it involves teaching a right behavior, instructing a right behavior. Yes, you are going to correct a wrong behavior when you see it take place on the field, but you're going to spend much more time showing them what they are to do. In high school, I had an incredible offensive line coach who also happened to be my neighbor growing up, Coach Johnson. Now, some of you may recognize that name. I told him yesterday that I was going to be using him in a sermon. He got a little worried, but I said, I promise, it's good. I promise. But Coach Johnson was someone who had, we had a great amount of respect for.

He was someone who would not shy away from correcting a wrong behavior. He would, how do I say this, he would sometimes speak to us with a high level of intensity and a high volume with that intensity. He wouldn't shy away from correcting a wrong behavior. We had a great amount of respect for Coach Johnson.

[10:45] In fact, I about fell out of my chair about a year ago. He's still neighbors with my parents, and I was over there with my girls outside, and he was walking along the top of the hill along a trail up there, and my girls yelled out, hey, Mr. Brian. I was like, girls, you can't call him Brian. That's Coach Johnson.

You can't say that. And so we have this high level of respect for him, but what made Coach Johnson such a good coach was that he spent far more time teaching us what we were supposed to do as opposed to constantly telling us what we did wrong. Now, when he would see wrong, he made sure that he corrected it. But he spent far more time each and every day of showing us this is what you're supposed to do.

This is what it means to be disciplined. So as we think about the discipline in the Christian life, let's make sure that we understand that discipline involves both correction and that discipline in the Christian life.

...that God may be complete, equipped for... ...that one of the greatest ways that God disciplines His children is through His Word.

And His Word tells us what we should be doing, but it also is corrective in our lives when we apply it to it. And so with this understanding of discipline, let's take a deeper dive into this passage.

[12:28] And after understanding what discipline is, I want us to clearly see the privilege of discipline. Very clearly see the privilege of discipline. Verses 4 through 9 says, Now, this is not primarily talking about fighting personal sins in our life, but this is talking about describing the challenges and difficulties of living a life that faithfully follows after Jesus.

And the persecution that you will receive when we live this disciplined life, when we run this race that God has called us to do. And He continues and He says this, 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 rejects.

No, it doesn't say rejects, it says who 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.

[13:48] Besides this, we had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the father of spirits and lived?

I've heard it said that there's two basic things that our children need from us. Now this is not talking about just the basic necessities of food, water, shelter, all those things.

But there's two basic things that our children need from us as parents. And the first thing that our children need from us as parents is they need a parent who follows Jesus.

This isn't something you can delegate. This isn't something that you can send off. They don't need just primarily a pastor who follows Jesus, a youth pastor who follows Jesus, a Sunday school teacher who follows Jesus.

They need a mom and dad who love Jesus and are spending their lives trying to follow after Him to the best of their ability. Second thing that was said was that all children need parents who actually parent.

[14:51] I know it's earth-shattering. It's groundbreaking. But they need parents who actually parent. Having children may make you a parent, but it doesn't mean that you are parenting.

A word that is very helpful to understand what parenting entails is the word discipline. Now again, I'm not just talking about correcting the wrong behavior, but also teaching the right behavior.

In fact, I would say that the vast majority of parenting and discipline would be more informative than corrective. The vast majority of parenting is teaching them, training them, raising them up, and not just pointing out every time they fail to do what you ask them to do, but it's teaching them what they are to do.

This is the challenge of parenting. It means being intentional in how we spend time with our kids. It means taking the time to teach them. It means having the hard conversations when they are needed and correcting the behavior.

There are so many times that I tell my kids, I'm doing this because I love you. And sometimes that's hard for them to understand. Sometimes it's hard for them to wrap their minds around this, but I'm telling you, I'm doing this because I love you.

[16:11] There are times when it would be far easier to just let them get away with something. And let's be honest, we do sometimes. Just let them get away because it's just easier not to address it.

But it's important that we take the time to correct and train. But I do this because they are my children. I do this because I love them too much not to discipline them.

The author is showing that the fact that the Lord disciplines us is evidence that we are His children. And there is nothing greater than being a child of God.

There's nothing greater. If we ever lose sight of the fact that we are His children, then it changes everything. This is a privilege to be disciplined by God because it means that He is our Father who is loving His children.

Being disciplined by God as seeing it as a privilege. The next thing that I want us to see in this passage is the purpose of discipline. Yes, we understand the privilege of discipline, but also there's a purpose behind this discipline.

[17:20] It says, It says, For they disciplined, starting in verse 10, 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 for those who have been trained by it.

You see, there's a purpose for this discipline. God's discipline changes us. It says that our parents disciplined us as it seemed best to them, but God disciplines us for our good.

The author recognizes that sometimes the discipline we give as parents and sometimes the discipline we receive as children is flawed. Sometimes it's not as it should be, but God's discipline is always right, and it is for our good.

See, as a parent, there are times when I have handled a situation that I thought, Man, it couldn't have gone better. I really knocked this one out of the park.

[18:32] I mean, I should write a book on parenting, on how I handled this situation. But then there's other times I'm like, Man, I really messed that one up. I really did not handle this the way that I should.

Last night we were on our way home late from a wedding, and the kids were being kids in the backseat, and they were just, you know, laughing. They got silly. They were just all having a good time.

We just kept getting on to them and on to them. And so I was, you know, losing my temper a little bit, and Catherine finally turned around and said, All right, guys, if I hear one more thing, if we have to address it one more time, you're going to have to go to both services and not go to children's church.

And I said, Is my preaching that bad? Where this is a punishment for them that they have to sit and listen to me two different times? But so we don't always handle it the right way.

We don't always do this perfectly. Sometimes, though, in those situations, the most helpful thing that I can do to right this wrong and help the situation is to look to my kids and go to them and apologize for how I handled a situation.

[19:50] You see, our kids, they don't need perfection. Thank goodness they don't because they won't get it from us. But what they need is a mom and dad who can admit when they are wrong and show their need and dependence on the Lord.

This is what they need. They need to see parents who may not get it right every single time, but they need to see parents who are depending on the Lord in their own lives.

And while my actions may not always be what they need to be, one of the things that is primarily true is that my intentions are. My actions are not always the best, but usually my intentions are right because as a dad, I love my kids so much and I want the very best for them.

When they are sick and hurting, I want to take it from them. I don't want them to be sick and hurting. I want to take it from them. I want the very best for them. And so while my intentions are usually where they need to be, my actions are not always.

But with our heavenly father, we have a father who not only has perfect intentions, we have a heavenly father who is perfect in his wisdom. The discipline we receive is not always what we want in the moment, but we can take comfort in knowing that it is for our good.

[21:11] Sometimes it's hard for children to understand why we give the instruction that we do. Charlotte, my seven-year-old, would love nothing more than a phone that she could have right now,

but she's not getting it.

She may not understand why she's not getting it, but as a parent, I know that's not what's best for her right now. I know that this may not be what is ideal for her right now.

We know what is good for her and oftentimes it's hard for us to understand this. Oftentimes it's hard for us to read God's word and see the life that he's called us to live and how that is far different than the life that we are living.

That doesn't always feel like it's for our good. Sometimes we may feel like it's unfair, but we trust the fact that the one who created everything knows what's best for his creation.

We trust that his ways are better. We trust that his ways are for our good. And if we ever doubt this, if we ever doubt his intentions and his motives and things, all we have to do is take a look at the cross where Jesus took our sin, our shame, the full weight of God's wrath, and he took it on himself for us.

[22:28] And so after doing this, after we submit our lives to his discipline and understand that he is the perfect parent and he disciplines us and it is for our good that he does, the final thing that I want us to see from this is the fact that we all need encouragement in our walk with the Lord.

We all need encouragement in this. We all need people to walk alongside us to remind us that this discipline is for our good, to keep us accountable when we read Scripture and we begin to apply to our eyes.

We need people who will speak into our lives. It says, Therefore, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather healed.

Strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble and by it many become defiled, that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau who sold his birthright for a single meal.

For you know that afterward when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

[23:51] You know, I heard a saying one time that said, Everything that is accomplished in this world is done by tired people. Can we say amen to that?

I think we're all tired. Some of you look a little tired right now. But now we understand that many times the things in this world are accomplished by tired people. We joke about this, but it's true in many ways.

We are tired a lot of times. But here's the thing, it's not a bad thing to be tired. I believe that it's good to wake up, go to work, have a hard day's work, do your very best there.

Come home and not give your family the leftovers, but say, you know what? I'm going to push this and give them my very best today. I'm going to give them the intention that they deserve. I'm going to give my very best to them, to love them well, to honor them well, to have that.

And then, take a back seat when we're like, the first thing that takes the back seat when we're like, I just don't have anything left today.

[25:09] The first thing that takes the back seat is our walk with the Lord. What is the first thing to go when life gets busy and we're exhausted with life?

Our discipline. Our walk with the Lord is the first thing that goes when life gets full of work, kids, extracurricular activities, and everything that you could think of, we start making excuses.

I don't have time to read my Bible today. I'll try to catch up on that tomorrow. I don't have time to pray today because I have too much to do. I don't have time to come to church.

This is why we need encouragement from fellow believers. This is why we need gospel community. This passage here in the middle of Hebrews chapter 12 is reminding us that in order to run the race that God has called us to, we must stay focused.

We must heed the warnings of Scripture. We need the encouragement of others to help us to do this. The passage tells us we need encouragement to lift our drooping hands and strengthen our weak knees.

[26:14] We need people to come alongside and say, I know that you're tired, but don't stop. This is what is most important. Make straight paths for your feet. Stay focused on the lane that God has called you to run in.

Keep your eyes fixed on the prize, on the end. We need encouragement to strive for peace with everyone. You know, we really don't need encouragement.

I don't know if you've ever noticed this. You don't really need encouragement to live in peace with people that get along with you, that share the same beliefs with you, that just go along with whatever you say.

That's pretty easy to stay at peace with this, but this says we need encouragement to stay in peace with everyone. We need encouragement for that. Amen? It's hard to do at times.

We need encouragement to flee from sexual immorality. It says we need people who will ask the hard questions. We need people who love us enough to keep us accountable, whether that's an inappropriate relationship with someone other than our spouse, turning away from God's design for the family and sexual relationships, or the less talked about problem of pornography addiction that plagues so many in churches across this country.

[27 : 30] We need encouragement in that. We need people who will ask those questions. We need encouragement to not be like Esau. You remember the story of Esau?

He was willing to sacrifice his long-term standing for a short-term pleasure. We need the encouragement from others to keep our focus on the real treasure, the greatest gift that we have, and that is Jesus.

We need help in running the race that God has called us to. But this idea of running the race that God has called us to is found throughout Hebrews, along with this idea of Jesus being greater and better than everything.

This idea permeates everything. This idea of running permeates everything. But also, this idea, this concept of encouragement, we see it all throughout this book as well because he understands that in order to see Jesus as better, in order to run this race that God has called us to, we need the encouragement from others.

We need this. I don't know if you remember back from Hebrews chapter 3, the author says, but exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

[28 : 54] I love how he says this. Encourage everyone today. How often should you do it? Well, as long as it's called today, do this. In other words, all day, every day, we need people in our lives that will encourage us to live the life that God has called us to live.

We need people who will keep us accountable, who will love us enough to ask the difficult questions. In other words, we need to take the warning seriously and urgently.

While it is still today, we should regularly be exhorting one another to live the life that God has called us to live. Again, this is one of my reasons that I love life groups and Sunday school so much. You know, we can encourage one another when we're all gathered together like this, and we should do that. But there's something about it when you get to have relationships that go beyond just seeing each other from a distance here, but where you share your concerns, where you share your prayer requests, where you say, hey, this is something that I'm struggling with, and you have brothers and sisters in Christ, who love you enough to put their arm around you and say, hey, I'll walk through this with you.

I'll be there through this difficult season with you. I'll be there to help hold you accountable when it is difficult to do this. And so this is why we need this. We need this in our lives.

[30 : 19] We need people who will be used by God to encourage us and be a part of the discipline that God has for us. Whether that discipline is correcting behaviors, or whether it is teaching right behaviors.

This is why gospel community is so important. And so let's go to the Lord in prayer and thank Him for that and ask Him to give us the boldness to step into that gospel community.

Father, thank You so very much. Thank You so very much for this passage, for what it teaches us about You, the importance of discipline, and the importance of walking with You.

And so, Lord, we are thankful that You are a Father who loves us enough to discipline us. We thank You for the privilege of being able to call You our Heavenly Father.

And Lord, I pray that if there's someone here today that hasn't had that opportunity, that hasn't placed their faith and their trust in You, that they'll see the beauty and the grace that we get to experience by having You as our Heavenly Father.

[31 : 28] And so, Lord, we thank You that You're a Father that loves us enough to discipline us. We thank You for that privilege. And Lord, help us to see the purpose of it.

That the purpose of this discipline, the purpose of this training and correcting, is for our good. To mold us and to shape us into who You've called us to be, to be better used by You.

And Lord, I pray that You help us to step into that gospel community, to open up with brothers and sisters in Christ who love us enough to be used by God to help in this process, to encourage us to constantly look to You when life gets busy, when life gets difficult, when the challenges come.

Lord, we need people to encourage us. And so, Lord, we thank You for this passage. We thank You for what it teaches us about You. And we ask all this in Jesus' name.

Amen. We're going to stand together and we're going to sing a song of invitation. And if the Lord is speaking to you this morning, won't you respond as we stand together and sing?