

The Discipline of Adversity

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[0 : 00] she had fallen at the last hurdle. She had trained for so long, so many hours of hard work, so many late nights, long days, being exhausted in body and in mind, missing out on friends, on fun, all because she had a goal in mind.

And now hardship had come, and it was all too much. Was it time to let go of that goal?

Was she going to let her family down? As I was describing a situation, what kind of image came to mind? This is not a rhetorical question.

Anybody want to throw out anything? What kind of situation were you imagining? Sorry, Janet, I didn't hear you. Dear sister. A sports person? Sports person?

You can imagine a sports person, they've got a goal in mind, they're going to run a marathon, they've been training for this event, 42Ks is a long way, and a person training for an event like this, they make choices not to spend time on certain things, they watch out for distractions, but then a hardship like an injury could hit.

[1 : 26] What other things were you imagining? Anyone? Maybe someone preparing for an exam, training hard, working hard, pursuing marks to get into a university.

Are you remembering when you worked hard to get where you are today? You know, there's that goal, and so everything else goes out the window. Exercise, friends, social time, the only choice is to study hard or work hard.

But right at the end, a hardship like stress under pressure can hit. Hardships and difficult moments like this, they break people.

You see injuries to professional sports people, they make people retire early. I've seen people change their university degrees because it just became too hard.

I see the amount of half-started projects around my house. There's a towel rack I haven't finished replacing. There's a broken kitchen cupboard I need to fix.

[2 : 34] Because at one point or another, they just get hard. The author of the letter to the Hebrews describes the Christian life like this.

It's been our slogan in that video we've been watching, you know, with Liv running. The author to the Hebrews describes this Christian life as a race.

God has chosen people for him through his grace, and now we run towards him. Being with Christ and becoming like him, that is the goal that we run towards.

And on the way, we have plenty of choices to make. Choices to follow him, and not to just chase our own desires. We must watch out for sin, being aware of the dangers around us.

And as we run this race, there will be hardships. These hardships are different to getting a broken leg from a race. But as we pursue different goals, hardships might break us and make us finish early.

[3 : 42] Or will the hardship push us on to the prize? But what's the point of hardships and difficulty as we follow Jesus?

How do we deal with frustrations and sin? Do we just say, come on James, you'll be fine, brush yourself off, Jesus loves you.

And is that all that we do with hardships? How do we view hard times as Christians? Today, as we finish our series on the disciplines of grace, we're going to see how God encourages us when hardship and difficult times hit.

So please pray with me. Heavenly Father, we have all experienced hard and painful times. And we know as people still living that there will be more hard and difficult times to come.

Father, help us to understand how you encourage us and how you are with us and love us in those times, Lord. Amen. The author of Hebrews, he writes to a church who it seems were faced with much persecution.

[5 : 04] They hadn't been persecuted yet enough to shed blood, but they were likely faced with daily persecution. And they're faced with this question, we're under attack and so who is in charge?

Is God really in charge? God, are you sovereign over our enemies? Or are they more powerful than you?

And so the author describes Christianity as a race. one with challenges and difficulties, but with a joy, a joy of being with Christ.

Have a look with me at Hebrews 12, verse 1. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus.

And then down to verse 3, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. There is temptation to grow weary and lose heart with whatever goal you are chasing.

[6 : 08] And this is not a short-term goal, this is not even a long-term goal like a 42k marathon. This is a lifelong goal of following Jesus and being with Him.

And the author of this letter encourages us as we run this race. Verse 5, and have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son.

It says, My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline and do not lose heart when He rebukes you because the Lord disciplines the one He loves and He chastens everyone He accepts as a son.

Father to child discipline is the way that God encourages us. And this encouragement is so we don't lose heart and so we don't grow weary. Now you might be thinking, discipline?

Discipline is what's supposed to encourage me. Maybe when you're in the midst of a hardship, maybe something like some comforting words, everything's going to be okay. That's what encourages you.

[7 : 19] Maybe a gift of food. Maybe, you know, I mentioned a pile of donuts the other week. That's really encouraging to me in difficult times. But here we see that God chooses discipline to encourage us.

What then is discipline? Here we go. Here's a definition of discipline for us. Discipline is training or correction. Discipline is training or education by correction or punishment.

Training or education by correction or punishment. And this is what God does for us and this is how he encourages us. Now the first thing to note with discipline from God is that he does not punish us.

God does not see our sinful behavior and get angry and send hardship to us. He does not go, you know, James, case in your sinning again, here's a lightning bolt to punish you.

God does not punish his people. Let me say that again. God does not punish his people who follow Jesus. But he disciplines us through hardship and adversity in our lives.

[8 : 37] These are painful and difficult but our hardships are not punishments. God has met out all of the punishment that we deserve on his son, Jesus.

That is the cross. That is the place where our punishment has been dealt with. But he does discipline us. He corrects and trains our behavior but in a relationship with him.

How do you feel with me saying that God trains and educates and changes our behavior through discipline and correction? Do you feel okay?

Does this idea of discipline make you feel a little bit awkward? When we think of God as a father who disciplines us, it can be hard for us not to think of our own parents or what we are like as parents disciplining our children.

And this can go either way. It could be, oh look, my father, he never disciplined me at all and I've turned out okay, so what's the point of discipline? I see no point.

[9 : 43] Or it could go the other way, my father was very firm. he always disciplined me very firmly and I've turned out okay, so of course I want God to discipline me.

Or our view of our fathers can be painful. Maybe we don't have a relationship with our father at all or maybe some of us have painful memories of being disciplined by a father.

Some of us might right now be in a difficult relationship with our fathers where discipline has crossed a boundary. For that person in that situation it can be hard to think that God should discipline.

Discipline can only seem like a bad word when we view discipline from our perspective in the world. But here in Hebrews 12 discipline is about loving correction.

It is guiding and putting us back on the path to follow the Lord. Before we look at what God's discipline actually looks like, the author wants to make sure that we get the most out of our correction.

[10 : 58] And so he says, my son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline and do not lose heart when he rebukes you because the Lord disciplines the one he loves and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.

he disciplines because he loves. And the first thing he wants us to be aware of is not making light of discipline. Making light of God's discipline.

This might seem difficult to do. If God is disciplining us, how would we make light of it? I think of a child who disciplines the, a child who disobeys the parent and is disciplined.

They can get upset at the parent, how dare you discipline me? I was in the right, you were in the wrong. Maybe you were like that as a child, maybe you've seen a child like that.

I see some people smiling, I don't want to know. A child in that position, thinking that they are right, they will never learn from discipline.

[12 : 05] And it's as easy for a parent to think, I've told my child the right way to go, I've disciplined them. But five minutes later they're doing the exact same thing again, making light of discipline and ignoring it.

A child, a person, us in that situation, we lack humility. We lack self-awareness that we desperately need God to correct us.

Don't make light of the Lord's discipline. Don't remain indifferent. Maybe you can vaguely see that God is calling you to change your behavior. But you don't actually spend time meditating on what it means.

It's not helpful for a child to ignore their parents' discipline. You know, the parent who says, don't touch that, it's hot. You know, you want your child to learn the lesson from the instruction and not them touching it.

God does the same thing. Don't go down that path. That is not the best way to go. you will hurt yourself. This is not the way I have for you.

- [13 : 14] Don't ignore me. And when we don't think about the discipline that God gives to us through hardship, we don't learn from it. And when we refuse to consider our deep and difficult times, our lives and relationships with God will just remain shallow.
- some of us can be indifferent to God's discipline, but for others, they can be crushed by it. They are overwhelmed and lose heart.
- And so the author of the Hebrews wants to make sure that you don't make light of God's discipline, but don't lose heart by his discipline. Don't be like the runner who collapses on the track completing that race.
- Maybe we hate conflict, we're unable to deal with correction. Maybe you are afraid that if God is disciplining you, it means he's angry with you.
- How do we face discipline from God without losing heart and without making light of it? The Lord disciplines the one he loves.
- [14 : 26] And he chastens everyone he accepts as his son. God disciplines the one he loves. This is a strange doctrine.
- It's a really difficult thing, but it's also a wonderful truth. On the one side, God disciplines, but it's only because he loves. God disciplines because he loves.
- God doesn't discipline out of wrath or anger. He's not punishing. It is truly only from love because he has made us his children and brought us into his family.
- One where he is the father and he cares for us. He cares for our instruction. The author to the Hebrews encourages this church when they are under attack.
- He reminds them of these promises. Don't lose heart. Don't make light of God's discipline. He will guide you in your growth and he does this all because he loves you.
- [15 : 31] So we come to the question, how? How does God actually discipline us? Hebrews 12 verse 7.
- Endure hardship as discipline. Just those simple four words, endure hardship as discipline. Hardship. Adversity.
- This is God's discipline. This is his correction or training for us. Now remember the Hebrew church were being persecuted.
- They were being attacked. Is it that God is doing that through fatherly love to correct this church?
- It doesn't say that God looks on while his people are being attacked and going through hardship. hardship, but that the Lord is the one who disciplines. He is the one who chastens.
- [16 : 30] He is the one who corrects and teaches. Does that mean that in some form God is in charge and responsible for all hardship?
- Is it possible that God not only allows hardship, but actually sends hardship to us, to draw us closer to him, to correct and to train us?
- Is God in control of all hardship? Is he in control of all of the difficult seasons that we face and experience in life?
- Of sickness and loss? Of losing a job? A relationship of hurt and brokenness? Does God just allow these things to happen or is he in some way involved in them all?
- Imagine two types of surgeons for me. There's the emergency room surgeon and then there is the elective surgery surgeon and I'll have our surgeon correct me later if I'm wrong about this.

[17 : 42] So we've got our two surgeons, the emergency room and then the elective planned surgery. The first emergency, the first one, the emergency room surgeon, a person comes in with a mangled leg.

Let's think of the situation, what's happened to them? Sorry, bike accident. Thank you, Nolly. But let's go, just a simple bike accident. Okay, that's nice, simple.

They've fallen off their bike and their leg is damaged. The emergency surgeon operates to save the leg and fix the situation. Okay, and then it's a very different from my limited understanding of surgery, which I have no understanding other than that TV show House.

Imagine on the other side with the elective surgery surgeon, a patient has come in with a cancerous growth on their leg and the surgeon has planned out what he needs to do, he's taken MRIs, x-rays, multiple scans, and he can see the growth inside the leg and they plan out what they're going to do, they draw on the leg what they're going to do, and he takes a scalpel, presumably, slices the leg, removes the cancerous growth, and then fixes it back up.

So we've got these two options. One responds to the damage and fixes it, one surgeon plans it, there is pain, but there is a healing as well.

[19 : 22] Which of these two is our God-like when it comes to hardship and pain? Is God-like the elective, is God-like the emergency room surgeon who sees our pain and just fixes us up, heals us, and goes, there you go, you'll be fine, go on.

Or is God sovereign and in control? He has planned out what needs to happen to us, and the pain of hardship will hurt us, much like the scalpel to the leg.

But he brings healing through that as well. God is not a passive observer. He doesn't sit idly by while we are being attacked, while we are under hardship.

The picture of God here is a father who is intimately involved in raising up his children. He is the one who is disciplining. God is the one who rules over sinners.

He is the one who is in control of those who are persecuting the church. Those people are still guilty, but God uses them to work out his loving purpose of disciplining this church, of growing them up in their faith.

[20 : 41] And he does the same for us. I was really sick a couple of weeks ago. What started as a cold grew into a flu and then very quickly full-blown man flu.

Ladies, you'll know how bad this is. Turned into a chest infection and four of us at home were hit really hard. Alyssa unfortunately was hit really bad, but she was the least sick somehow.

She wasn't well. I couldn't do much at the time but pray to God, help me get better. God help me get better. Now, God was in control of that situation.

I can't see the exact connection between being sick and my sin, but looking back, it's made me wonder, it's made me wonder, was God trying to teach me something then?

Was he disciplining me because I don't depend on him and I depend on antibiotics, just the fact that I will get better? I still think I'm physically capable.

[21 : 51] Do I have an idol of health and self-control that God was just trying to break down so that I depended on him? I wonder if God uses hardships because we just don't listen.

Does God use hardships because it is too easy to ignore him when all is going well? And he needs to remind us of how much we need to depend upon him.

We do like to draw the connection, God is sending this because of my sin, this hardship is all of my fault, I'm being punished for this. can we tell always if a particular hardship has come from a specific sin in our life?

Well, we might be able to, the Holy Spirit might bring it to our attention, but I think chasing reasons for hardship can be a danger. It can make our lives much like a Western version of karma, where we think this hardship has happened because of my sin, I'm at fault and God has sent this to me, this pain is because of that action I did, but I think this is dangerous because Jesus has taken our punishment for our sins, and we don't have to bear some of the pain for our sin, Jesus has taken that, but every expression of discipline is intended to bring us to be more like Jesus.

Now, during a moment of hardship, we often will not see the point. We won't see what God is doing. But during hardship, it should be enough for us to know that God is in control, and this hardship is somehow for our good.

[23 : 46] The author to the Hebrews gives us an encouragement, God is in control of all things, even hardships, hardships, and he uses them for our good to guide and grow us.

The encouragement and comfort here must come from the fact that God is in control. So God encourages us to continue the race, and he uses hard times to discipline us.

But why? Why? Why does he use hard and painful things? Verse 7 again, God is treating you as his children.

For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined, and everyone undergoes discipline, then you are not legitimate. The author uses a very real-world example to explain why God disciplines.

In the first century, children were disciplined by their fathers. It was their responsibility. They had the primary focus of disciplining. And the argument goes that children are disciplined by their fathers unless there is something wrong.

[25 : 02] An illegitimate child would not be disciplined. Discipline is actually a proof for us that we have a close relationship with God.

We are not illegitimate children he feels burdened to carry like he's just got to feed us, but he doesn't want to look at us. It's actually the opposite. God disciplines us because we are so close.

Now our fathers discipline as best as they thought possible, but God as a father disciplines not like us. A parent might have a good or a bad relationship with discipline.

Even the best parents discipline as best as they think. But we are all fallible. Every parent is fallible. They're inconsistent and often guided by emotions.

Anyone who has tried to discipline a child in a godly manner knows that there are simply times when you don't do the right thing or you just don't know what the right thing to do is.

[26 : 10] How do I discipline this child? How much do I discipline them? How much is too much? What is harsh? What is enough? I've seen my children shrug off discipline.

Just water off a duck's back. But I've also seen them emotionally crushed by my discipline. Finding the right balance between those two is a challenge.

God is not an inconsistent parent.

He doesn't discipline harshly based on his emotions. God always cares for us in the same way. He doesn't have debate with himself.

What is the best thing to do in this moment? He knows what we need and he only gives us what we need. Verse 10, God disciplines us for our good in order that we may share in his holiness.

[27 : 36] No discipline seems pleasant at the time but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace. God has a purpose behind every piece of hardship.

It's not pleasant, it's just like that scalpel, but it is done for our good, for our holiness, for our peace, and for our righteousness. righteousness. And those are definitely the places that we need to be growing in as Christians.

It is not pleasant, but it is designed only for our good. When we are in the midst of hardship and pain, we can't understand why it's happening.

All we can do is to cry out to God to end the pain, bring this suffering to an end. It might not be years later until we realize what God has done.

He may have sent hardship and difficult times to you when you were a teenager to prepare you to be who you are today. He may have corrected you and disciplined you in your 20s so that in your 40s you were able to survive what was going on.

[28 : 49] He might be disciplining you today in hardship because of what is coming in the future. We might never know the reason for a season of hardship and pain but God knows.

He's planned it and he is sovereign over it. Even though we can't see what God is doing in the midst of hardship we must remember that he is sovereign and in control.

If you're in a season of hardship or pain or adversity today hold on to that truth that God is in control and he loves you. Remember these two truths when hard times come because the longer that we live the more likely that difficult times are coming.

I heard about a woman who was about to become a grandmother. Her new grandchild was in a different state in the US and to see this grandchild she would have to fly.

But this woman hated flying. was absolutely terrified of it. But the only way to overcome her fear to endure the hardship of flying was with the destination in mind.

[30 : 10] We have a journey marked out for us with the joy of being with the Lord at the end of this race. But this journey called life is not always easy.

there are good times. There are hard times. And God uses these to train and to correct and adjust our hearts and he does this lovingly because he is our father who loves and cares for us.

Let me pray. Heavenly father you are a good and generous God. We thank you that you are in control of all things, that you are in control of good times and difficult days, Lord.

Father, when we are in those difficult days, those hard times, remind us that you are in control and that you love us. Use these to discipline us, to bring us back to you, so that we can reach the end of this race marked out for us.

For what a joy it is to be your children, Lord. Amen. Amen.