

The Discipline of Grace

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 June 2019

Preacher: James Barnett

[0 : 00] I was out early on a cold Sunday morning three weeks ago, running down at the National Park. I was only thinking about one thing.

Why? Why am I up on such a cold morning going for a run? Instead of being in bed with my fingers freezing off, that warm shower was beckoning to me.

But something was disciplining me to endure. Discipline is what trains or corrects our behavior. And the only thing that was disciplining me to go faster and to run was to run faster than my father.

My dad, who is 28 years older than me, has always been faster than me. And it's driven me to train at the gym, down at the track in the National Park.

And two weeks ago, I finally beat my father's PB. I'm faster than him by seven seconds at the moment. Now I've got my sights set on something higher, something a little bit more improbable, beating Steve Jeffrey himself.

[1 : 13] We'll see if we can get there. I'm going to need a lot of discipline to get there. But we're all disciplined by a variety of things. It could be the desire for coffee to get out of bed in the morning.

It could be the desire for money and success to work hard. But just like my desire to run, it can swing in and out of season.

One day we might be very motivated to work hard. The next day we are motivated by a desire for leisure. What is it that disciplines us to obey God?

What teaches and corrects our behavior following God? We want to be good people who are honest and patient and generous, not thieves, not someone who bullies others, not someone who destroys other people's character or hurts people.

But what disciplines and corrects us to behave like God? If you're anything like me, your discipline following God swings, just like my pursuit of running.

[2 : 23] Would it be true that some days it can seem great? You know, you might get up early, you read your Bible, you spend some time meditating and praying with God, and then you feel all day like everything just clicks.

And pursuing holiness, it just happens. You get to share Jesus with someone. But then some days it feels like a nightmare. You don't sleep well, you wake up late.

You don't have time for God. You don't have time to read the Bible and pray and meditate. You snap at the kids, you kick the dog, you get angry with people at work, and you feel far from God all day.

We can feel the gap between those two days, and we can just feel that we need to work harder, motivated by different things. But the truth of the gospel is that we are saved by God's grace, and it is God's grace that continues to train us.

There's a quote from a book called *Disciplines of Grace* by Jerry Bridges. He has this quote, Our worst days are never so bad that we are beyond the reach of God's grace, and our best days are never so good that we are beyond the need of God's grace.

[3 : 46] We are never beyond the reach of God's grace. Our bad days are never that bad that we're too far from God, and our good days are never so good that we don't need God's grace.

And this is the place that we find ourselves in as we start a new series, *Disciplined by Grace*. And we're going to see that it is within God's grace, God's unearned, undeserved love for us, that we are trained and corrected.

But we're also going to look at the things that we substitute in to try and motivate ourselves to obey God. So let me pray for us as we come to God's word. Heavenly Father, thank you so much that we can be gathered today, treasuring you together, and that we get to sit around your word.

God, give us ears to hear, so we can understand what motivates us to follow you. Amen. Let me read from Ephesians chapter 2.

It says, For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith. And this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not by works, so that no one can boast.

[4 : 56] We are saved by God's grace, his unearned, undeserved love. And we don't do anything to be saved. As Nick mentioned before, he just put his hand up, realizing his need.

But then, we start to learn what a Christian is supposed to be. We read parts of the Bible, like Galatians 5, where we see the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness. And we're supposed to show these things. And we go, we have these lists that make us forget that we're saved by God's undeserved, unearned grace.

And our behavior becomes a priority. We might be measuring ourselves against other Christians to give us a sense of understanding how we're going.

Oh, I'm sinning less than him. I'm better off than her. God must be happy with me. He must be happy with what I'm doing because I've pegged myself against someone else.

[5 : 56] Our view of ourselves goes from God's view and it changes based on our performance. I think it ultimately comes from a good place where we have a desire to do the right thing.

People who are Christians want to follow and obey God and to pursue holiness. But we easily make God's things things that we can achieve on our own.

Let's see what should be motivating us to pursue God from Titus chapter 2, verse 11. For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to everyone.

Grace. Grace has appeared. God's unearned, undeserved love has appeared and his name is Jesus. His death and resurrection offers us salvation. We can have forgiveness and friendship with God not because of us but because salvation is a free gift.

God doesn't start the work of salvation and then say, off you go. Good luck. Try really hard to follow me, okay? But now you're on your own.

[7 : 10] He still actively works. Spiritual growth is not our initiative. It is God's. And he keeps working in us through his undeserved and unearned grace.

God is the one who has given us his Holy Spirit so that we can read his word, the Bible, and actually listen to it so that we can hear him speak. So from Hebrews chapter 12, which was read for us, it says that the Lord disciplines the one he loves and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.

Endure hardships as discipline because God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? Discipline is whatever God chooses to use to grow us in godliness. Like a parent teaching and correcting, the difference is a child will grow up. A child will grow up and become an adult. But we, as God's children, never arrive fully formed this side of heaven.

We continue to be God's children who are in need of teaching and training. He has saved us, but he doesn't want us to stay like we are.

[8 : 28] He wants to change us to fit heaven and it's a sign that he loves us. God's discipline is a positive thing because he loves us. And now God has a magnitude of options to choose how he's going to train and rebuke us.

He uses his word as we read it and it's wonderful to see that our kids love reading God's word. He might be nudging us or pushing us to obey him from his word.

It could be preaching like this. It could be the words of someone in your community group. It could be a friend. God knows exactly what we need at any given point.

And our response to God's discipline should be obedience and trust. But we don't pursue God. We don't pursue holiness and being like God on our own.

We don't do it to remain in God's kingdom once he saves us. But God himself teaches us and trains us to obey him. It's called sanctification.

[9 : 37] Sanctification is being made holy. It's God doing his work in us making us like him. And it's not that he's changing us because he's angry with us.

He's not upset like a parent might be when they see a child behaving the wrong way and they snap at them. His salvation for us and his sanctification are both works of his grace.

His unearned and undeserved love. God's discipline in our lives and the desire to pursue God is a gift. We can't pursue him on our own and without his help we can do nothing to please him.

Paul continues in Titus 2, verse 12. God's grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

Paul says that not only does God's grace save us and bring us into his family, his grace is our teacher. It teaches us to say no and it teaches us to say yes.

[10 : 49] No to disregarding God. No for ignoring him and taking him for granted. And God's grace teaches us to say yes to self-control, to uprightness, to godliness.

Godliness. And these three terms, godliness, uprightness and self-control, they reflect how we take care of ourselves, how we respond to others and how we respond to God.

God takes us, a people who are stuck in darkness, the place where we are unable to obey God, stumbling around, hurting one another, and he offers us salvation.

He brings us into his marvelous light, into his kingdom, where we can see who Jesus really is and see who we are. But when we change teams, when we go from the dominion of darkness to the dominion of light, we come over with a lot of old habits.

We come over with a lot of bad habits, a lot of old ways of doing things. There's a really old movie called Pretty Woman. Has anybody seen the movie Pretty Woman? The movie came out in 1990, so that's going to date you a little bit.

[12 : 00] In this movie, Pretty Woman, there's a high-flying businessman played by Richard Gere, and he pulls a woman off the street to pretend to be his girlfriend.

It's not a very wholesome movie, but it's useful for this illustration. They're totally mismatched socially. One is from the top end of society, one is from the very bottom, but he invites her in, he gives her his credit cards, and she goes off shopping, and very soon, she looks like the top end of society.

She's looking like the best of 80s fashion. This was only 1990, so the outfits are terrible. She looks the part. She looks like she should fit in, but she doesn't know how to act the part.

She still has the bad habits of where she's come from, the bottom end of society. She doesn't speak the same way. She doesn't know how to use the right cutlery at the fancy dinner table.

She's gone from the bottom to the top, but she still has the bad habits of where she's come from.

And there's a process, and this is the joy of the movie as we see her transformed.

[13 : 11] This kind of thing, it's not that different for us. God has plucked us from being his enemies, and he has taken us to the very top of society, God's children.

But we bring a whole lot of bad habits with us. Sinful practices, ways of speech, unhelpful, ungodly attitudes. But God trains us himself.

And it's not to keep us in the kingdom of God. It is because God has brought us into his family that he is fitting us to obey and to be part of his family.

He's showing us what it is like to be in his family. And this is a wonderful joy, brothers and sisters, that God disciplines us and doesn't leave us with our bad habits that hurt ourselves and hurt other people.

The desire to pursue God and be like him is all his gift. And when we remember this, it protects us. Knowing the place of God's discipline protects us from setting our own discipline and attempting to follow God motivated by the wrong thing.

[14 : 21] We're going to see three things that might be motivators for you to obey God. Three things that might motivate us and discipline us in the wrong way to obey God.

The first one is that we can be disciplined by debt. 1 Corinthians 6.20 says that you were bought for a price. Jesus has paid a price for us to be brought into heaven.

He paid for our sins dying on the cross and this is wonderfully true and we are saved. And because of this we are in debt to God but God's gift of salvation is our free gift.

We can't pay back this gift. It is a real problem for a Christian or for a person to try and pay back this debt to God and to be disciplined by debt.

Motivated to perform so well to pay back God thinking God has done so much for me I have sinned so much and yet he has forgiven me so much by Jesus' blood I owe him so much so do you know what I'm going to obey really hard I'm going to pay him back because I am in so much debt and I am going to be good enough for Jesus' sacrifice.

[15 : 44] In Filipino culture there is a concept if I can get my Tagalog right correct me utang na la ob how is this for my Tagalogs because that's okay yes utang na la ob in Filipino culture it's this concept called the debt of volition it's this idea that you are in someone's debt as long as you live

and if someone gives you something and places you in their debt you don't know how to measure this amount of debt that you are in and you might never know if you have paid this debt back can you imagine being in debt to someone and you have no idea where you stand with them and it creates a relationship that is dependent and you just are always unsure do I need to keep doing what they ask me do I keep paying them back and this idea of being in debt to others it's a danger for us if that's how we respond to God we can easily think of God with a relationship in terms of debt we can focus on what he's done in the past and now what I have to do obeying him as a form of repayment being motivated to be holy to pay back

God is impossible because we're never going to pay that debt back if you're anything like me with the amount I sin throughout the day this is not a close and intimate relationship it's not a healthy relationship with God and it only takes part of the gospel into account it focuses on the slave and master relationship and not the parent child relationship with God when we're disciplined by God's grace and not by debt we're reminded that we can't pay back God we can't pay back God for the sin we've committed and the sins we will commit but he has forgiven them as an act of grace for some it might be easier to think about our relationship with God like duty so we can be disciplined by a sense of duty to follow God maybe we've come from a family system that's all about obligations and expectations and this is how you must obey as a child of this family this is what you are to do and these are the expectations you're a barnet and this is what a barnet does this is the university you have to go to this is the job you have to have and if you fail you shame this family and you let us all down everyone does their duty and the family works

God has done his duty providing for us and we are bound to respond with obedience so we can be disciplined by a sense of duty to follow God God again is a master in this situation and we have to obey it makes our pursuit of holiness a legal obligation that we have to carry out devoid of love and mercy and intimacy again we are responsible we do have a duty to obey God he is our master but if that's where it stops if it's devoid of grace his unearned and undeserved love then being disciplined by a sense of duty or obligation is just going to lay a burden on our shoulders that we can never lift if we're disciplined by duty it will eventually turn into a worship of God that is based on our works God's teaching and instruction is done within a relationship one where Jesus has fulfilled every legal responsibility and obligation and we reap the rewards of what Jesus has done so we can be disciplined by a sense of duty we can be disciplined by a debt to him and lastly we can be disciplined by doubt unsure of whether Jesus' death was really sufficient doubting that really God does God really love me I'm not sure and so I'm going to cover my bases with obedience I'm going to make sure that I'm in God's good books by doing everything I can I'm going to try and tip the balance you know there's my sins there's Jesus' work and just to make sure this side is heavier I'm going to put my works on top of Jesus' as if that were possible trying to give God every reason on top of what Jesus has done to let me into his family

I can imagine doing something like this in my work before ministry where you know around this time of year was when we had the pay increases and so you know it was always trying to be on best behaviour you know get to work early leave late after the boss has left I try and look as good as possible I'm always working really hard when he was around just to make sure that the boss had no doubt in his mind that I was one of the hard workers but if we're disciplined by doubt we run the risk of forgetting the gospel our anxiety and our worry becomes bigger than God's grace his undeserved and unearned love that there is nothing we can do at all to earn his forgiveness and yet he gives it anyway there is nothing we can do to get his approval yet Jesus' blood wipes away our sin and makes us approved before God if we are pursuing holiness and obedience to God with a sense of doubt let me encourage you to come back to the heart of the gospel that you are loved even though you are unlovely you are forgiven even though you do not deserve it imagine you hop on the metro later today the metro is full it's pumping and unfortunately it crashes and everyone on that train goes to heaven and everyone rushes off that train to head to God and to get into heaven and start the feast it's a terrible accident but we are in heaven it's good and you are there thinking great [22 : 27] I am nearly there but you are just dragging these three big bags behind you one has got debt written on it one has got duty written on it and one has got doubt written on it and you are dragging these three bags with you I just need to carry my works to work off my debt the works of my duty and just in case Jesus hasn't done enough I have got an extra bag filled with some other good things just in case and I am going to take these to God and I am going to get into heaven and you are dragging these and huffing and puffing you finally get there everybody that was on the train

is already in they are enjoying the feast it's wonderful and you drop it all at God's feet and say God look at what I have done I worked hard all my life to pay you back for Jesus dying for me I have done all of these things out of debt out of obligation to you and I have got an extra bag just in case you want a little bit extra that is just for you surely that is all you have required of me what do you think

God's response would be I can't help but imagine God would respond like a patient parent to an anxious child little child you didn't have to drag all of this here your entry in here has already been paid your ticket was purchased by Jesus many years ago that all looks exhausting all you had to do was obey and I know that was hard for you because you were sinful but I was next to you every step of the way but you always forgot that I love you and you motivated yourself with the wrong thing brothers and sisters let's not forget that God disciplines us from a place of love and forgiveness run to him asking him to help you to obey ask him where you were sinning it's a dangerous thing to do to ask God where you were sinning to point it out if you don't know he will point it out and listen really well because God will reveal how you need to change it could come through a friend it could come through reading God's word when I do this very quickly many of my faults come to mind run to

God and ask for him to help you to obey him beg him on your knees for the power of his holy spirit to give you self control upright and godliness and don't be motivated by a sense of debt or duty or doubt let me pray for us heavenly father I