

Learn to appreciate discipline

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Am I on? Yes, you can all hear. Good. Nice to see everybody this morning. First slide, please. Life skills to live by. We're continuing with the book of Proverbs, lessons from the book of Proverbs. Learn to appreciate discipline, Proverbs 12 and 13.

Splendid, John. Thank you for this. See me in my office later. A lot of us associate discipline, don't we, with school, I suppose. And things that happened to us at school. I think one of the things I remember at school, always remember, is one of our teachers, he was a PE teacher and a maths teacher.

And he had a table tennis bat, but it wasn't an ordinary table tennis bat. It was about that thick. And that was the discipline he used to impose on the class. And he went through the whole class one day. He came in and he said, has anybody spoken while I was out of the class? He told us all to be quiet.

Andy's taking note of this, you see, when he's at school this week. And he said, has anybody spoken? And of course, nobody stood up at all. And he asked again and again. And then finally, one at a time, everybody stood up, boys and girls alike.

And the girls all received a stroke of the cane. And the boys all received a bat with this table tennis bat on the behind. And that's, I think, how many of us of an older generation certainly will remember discipline.

[1 : 28] But I hope this morning as I talk that this belies that vision you might have of discipline. Next slide, please.

I'm going to read from Hebrews 12, verses 4 to 11. 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 addressed 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 whom he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

Endure hardship as discipline, for God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you're 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.

[2 : 44] 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.

May God bless the reading of his word. Next slide, please. So we're continuing in Proverbs chapter 12 and 13, and it's a continuation, as John said last week, of Solomon's wise saying.

Solomon, as we know, when God asked him what he wanted out of everything in the world, he said wisdom. And these are the sayings of Solomon, these wise sayings.

And chapter 12 and 13 is full of these sayings, one or two here. Better be a nobody and yet have a servant that pretend to be somebody and have no food.

A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies. A wise son or daughter heeds his or her father's instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke.

[3 : 59] He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm. So all of these sayings, and we've had sermons over the last few weeks, focusing on these wise sayings of Solomon.

And in chapter 12 and 13, it contrasts the ways of the righteous with those of the wicked. The ways of those who are disciplined in their lives with the ways of those who are not disciplined.

The righteous are wise. They're described as wise. The wicked are described as deceitful. The righteous are described as praised.

Praised for being righteous. The wicked are described as despised. The righteous as truthful.

The wicked as trapped. Trapped in their lives. Trapped in their deceit. Trapped in their lives.

[5 : 19] The righteous are described as diligent. The wicked are described as lying. The righteous are described as good. The wicked are described as shameful.

We all know those shameful things in our lives that we like to keep hidden. They are shameful. And at times, we are shamed by things we've done, by things we've said.

The righteous are honored. And the wicked go hungry. The true wealth of wisdom is understanding that God wants people to be sensible, hardworking, honest, content with what they have, to enjoy life, and to bless their descendants.

And I was thinking about this. And I was thinking, what's a good metaphor for discipline? And I racked my brains about this for quite a long while.

And eventually, I thought, you know, we sometimes get the false impression that discipline is about, you mustn't do this, you mustn't do that. You mustn't do this, you mustn't do that.

[6 : 25] And we have a tendency to feel that we're hemmed in by not doing things, being careful not to do things, being careful not to say things. And then I thought of a swimmer.

And then I thought of a swimmer. You know, a swimmer at the Olympics in the pool, ready to go, dives in as the pistol fires, dives in and swims.

But they don't swim all over the place, do they? You know, it's a big pool. It's 50 meters long by however wide it is. Somebody will tell me how wide an Olympic-sized pool is.

And it's got six or eight lanes in it. And they're all cordoned off. And if that swimmer dived in and swam anywhere he or she liked, it would cause chaos, wouldn't it?

It would cause chaos for them. It would cause chaos for their opponents. It would cause chaos for the judges. It would cause chaos for the broadcasters. It would be completely anarchic, this swimmer just going off into the next lane and then back to the next one.

[7 : 26] The swimmer stays in the lane. But they're free to swim to the best of their ability in that lane. And I thought, yeah, that's, for me, that, for me, helps with discipline.

It's not about being hemmed in by don't do this, don't do that. But do what you do to the best of your ability in your lane.

Dive in and be free in that lane to do your best. And win the race. And I thought that, for me, that really was a good metaphor.

I did think of athletics and I thought, no, not all athletics races stick to one lane. So I thought, I'll move on from that one. So that's why it was swimming. Next slide. Oh, sorry.

The poverty of the foolish, however, is a lack of discipline leading to ruin. This is what God tells us, that a lack of discipline is the poverty of the foolish and leads to ruin.

[8 : 26] Next slide now, please. Thank you. So I was looking at a dictionary definition of Christian discipline. And it said, the virtue that allows a person to exercise self-control, which is a fruit of the Spirit.

Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. A subject of the Bible and a believer's ability to be conformed to the image and example of Jesus Christ.

So that's what discipline is about. Discipline is not about being hemmed in. It's about being free to exercise your self-control and to be conformed into the image and example of Jesus.

Where are we? To be like Jesus, the example of Jesus. Next slide, please. Now, in the NIV version, which is the version of the Bible we use here at church, Discipline is mentioned three times in chapters 12 and 13, and I'd just like to look at those three verses.

So the first one is, whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid. The next one is, he who spares the rod hates his son.

[9 : 47] Oh, might they spare the rod and spoil the child. But he who loves him is careful to discipline him. He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored.

Next slide, please. So the first one, whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid. So have we made mistakes?

Have we been indisciplined? Yes. I don't think there's any of us here who wouldn't put our hands up if we were asked and were honest. Have we made mistakes? Have we done wrong things?

I remember as a child, next door, Mrs. Hunter, had little Pekingese dogs. And I decided one day to entertain these dogs, so I systematically cleared out our garden shed and threw everything over the fence to amuse these dogs.

I mean, I was about four or five, I suppose, at the time. What I thought would happen when Mrs. Hunter came home, I don't really know. But anyway, she came home, and of course, the next time, on our front door.

[11 : 02] And, you know, what has Richard been up to? And, yeah, I'd entertained these dogs with everything from the garden shed that I could think of.

Toys and rakes and holes and goodness knows what had gone over to entertain these dogs. Goodness knows what the dogs thought. And so my mother disciplined me.

She said, right, you know, this is, she told me off, of course. And then said, right, you've got to go around to Mrs. Hunter and apologize. And let me make clear here.

It belies that old adage that says it's easier to apologize than to, what is it, easier to apologize afterwards than to ask for pension beforehand.

Well, no, it's not easy to apologize when you're confronted by a very large, very stout, very cross Mrs. Hunter. So anyway, I apologized to Mrs. Hunter.

[12 : 02] And then she took me out for an ice cream, which I thought was rather nice. I thought, well, that's very nice of her. She was a terrible driver in an old standard Vanguard. And some people here will remember the old standard Vanguard cars.

And I got my ice cream and I thought, well, actually, you know, I did that. Then I apologized. Then I got my ice cream. And we're driving along. Suddenly she slammed the brakes on and my ice cream went out the window.

So I lost out my ice cream. And maybe God was just saying something to me way back then. You know, don't get too smug. You know, you did do wrong. So yes, I did wrong. And before I became a Christian as well, I did plenty of other things wrong.

I would swear and take the Lord's name in vain. And it was one of those things when I became a Christian in 1984 that I felt very much on my heart that God wanted me to change.

And I had to work very hard on that. And so, yes, I just had to work hard.

[13 : 12] It was a conviction upon my heart. And now I'm going to burst into song. Jeepers, creepers, where'd you get those peepers?

Jeepers, creepers, where'd you get those eyes? Anybody know that song? Thank you. 1938, just for those who were wondering. I was just a boy at the time.

It actually came second. It came behind Thanks for the Memories with an Academy Award. Thanks for the Memories won the Academy Award.

Jeepers, creepers came behind it. But Jeepers, creepers. So we think, oh, nice little song. Nothing to it. Well, Jeepers is a minced oath.

Now here's something. What is a minced oath?

[14 : 13] A minced oath is a euphemistic expression formed by deliberately misspelling, mispronouncing, or replacing, a part of a profane, blasphemous, or taboo word or phrase to reduce the original term's objectionable characteristics.

Yeah. Draw a breath there. Yes. How many of us say, crikey, blimey, heck, flipping heck?

And so it goes on, blooming heck. Darn it. But those are all minced oaths. They're all substitutes for the real thing, if you like, the industrial language that we hear about and we see.

So we can't get off lightly. We can give ourselves half a pat on the back if we don't swear, but only half a pat if we don't think about our minced oaths as well.

And I certainly use them. I know that. And Jeepers was another one. Jeepers was a substitute for Jesus. So it's important that we learn from our mistakes and our indiscipline.

[15 : 24] And a wise person takes correction and criticism into consideration. That's what being wise is, isn't it? We don't just dismiss criticism. We don't just turn away from it.

We don't just poo-poo it. We actually take it into consideration and think, how can it make me better? How can it make me a better person?

How can I be more disciplined? The foolish person is unteachable. And it says in, what do I do with my Bible? There it is. It says in Proverbs 26, 12.

Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him. The unteachable spirit. We may well all have come across people who are just unteachable.

We try to tell them things. They just won't listen. They just don't listen. They just won't have it. They're just in their own world believing that they're right.

[16 : 29] And then it comes to some of these words that are really strong words here. Stupid, which is likening a person to the uncontrolled and unreasoning mind of an animal.

It's nice, isn't it? 2 Peter 2, 12 says, But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed.

And like beasts, they too will perish. So if you won't listen to discipline, if you won't take discipline, Scripture describes you as stupid, like an unreasoning animal.

And love and hate, strong words, aren't they? Love and hate, really strong terms. I hate so-and-so. Do you really hate? So-and-so, do you really?

I support Newcastle. And sometimes I say, I hate Sunderland. I hate Sunderland. Do we really hate Sunderland? Of course we don't. Not really. We try not to, don't we?

[17 : 37] Love and hate is the response of the godly and the ungodly. The godly don't enjoy discipline, but welcome it.

The ungodly have chosen to ignore the lessons, to hate them, and are acting stupidly. It's strong stuff in the Scripture. Love and hate, stupidity.

Next slide, please. Now, he who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him. Now, the origin of spare the rod and spoil the child, the actual phrase never appears in Scripture.

Spare the rod and spoil the child. And how many times have we heard, well, spare the rod and spoil the child. You know, get that. Let's go and whip them into shape. Well, the origin of spare the rod and spoil the child is from Samuel Butler, who was a poet, apparently, in the 1600s.

And he wrote a poem called Hudibra or Hudibras. And it was a rather bawdy and risqué poem. And the understanding is from that poem that spare the rod and spoil the child was really about spanking.

[18 : 54] In a sexual fetish way. Or, indeed, spare the rod and spoil the child in terms of preventing conception. Now, I'll let you all sort of think about that rather than explain anything to you.

But take time to think about that. Spare the rod and spoil the child. That's where the original spare the rod and spoil the child came from. And I've got the quote here from the poem.

If matrimony and hanging go by destiny, why not whipping too? What medicine else can cure the fits of love when they lose their wits?

Love is a boy by poet stilled. Then spare the rod and spoil the child. So it's not about, discipline is not about sparing the rod and spoiling the child.

It's not only about physical discipline or that which then can become abuse. This endorses loving discipline.

[19 : 59] Proverbs 1 and verse 7 says, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. But fools, back to that strong language again, fools despise wisdom and discipline.

It's about loving discipline. Like a shepherd and his shavat. Now the shepherd's shavat was the crook or the piece of wood that the shepherd would use in Bible lands.

And it was a symbol of discipline. So it had four uses, four practical uses. If the shepherd tossed it, that would startle the sheep and make the sheep look and come back.

He could fend off attackers with it, obviously, with his staff. He could count the sheep with it. He would put it down and let one sheep come under and then another one and then another one and so on.

And he could pull back the wool with it to look and check if there were ticks and other diseases maybe on the skin of the sheep. So it had four practical uses.

[21 : 08] And loving discipline has four practical uses. How many times have we, as a child of ours or a child that's been with us, gone to do something silly?

You know, sort of said, Oh, I wonder what happens if I stick my wet finger in that plug socket. Stop! You know, we startle them to stop them, don't we, sometimes. Fend off attackers.

We would fend off attackers for our children. Of course we would. Count them. Well, yeah, sometimes. I do know somebody who left a child in a bank one day in Thirsk.

He went off and he ran the shopping center and suddenly there was a call with Mr. I won't give his name, Jared Kelly. Please come to the main office.

And he thought, what have I done? What are they calling me for? When he went to the office and the security guy said, I think you left a child in the bank. So he had.

[22 : 07] He'd forgotten. And pulled back wool. Well, yes. If we think our child has a disease or a sickness, of course, we'd look for it and try and do something to help. And it has five symbolic users, the Shabbat, for parenting.

Security. You are loved. You are taken care of. You are looked after. Guidance. Keeping children.

Guiding them. Teaching them. The right way. Protection. Evaluation. And again, that idea that we would do anything to protect our children.

Evaluation. You count. You mean something. You mean something to this family. You mean something to God. And diagnosis. If something is wrong, we'll help you.

If something is wrong, come to me and I'll help you. And God says that to us. If something is wrong. Alan was talking about that earlier. If something is wrong, go to God and speak to him about it.

[23 : 14] Next slide, please. We have a natural tendency, don't we, to greater and greater sin through our inherited sinful nature. And a loving parent disciplines a child to keep them from evil habits.

There's a word, habits. I was looking to see how long it takes to establish a habit. And apparently, according to the wonderfully named website, calm.com.

Isn't that great? Calm.com. It takes between 18 and 254 days to establish a habit. So, about three weeks to, the best part of what, two-thirds of a year or thereabouts, I suppose, to establish a habit.

So, it's important that we discipline parents. As parents, we discipline children to keep them from evil habits. And God will discipline us.

We know when we do something wrong in our conscience, don't we? We know when we say something wrong or when we do something wrong that we've got into an evil habit, that we've done something wrong.

[24 : 24] God is disciplining us. And a lack of discipline leads to laziness and dishonesty. Sin has consequences.

It always does, doesn't it? You know, when I threw those toys over into the dogs, you know, it had consequences. If I swore at somebody, it would have consequences.

Sin always has consequences for the person to whom we're singing against or to ourselves.

And we need to always ask. When we know we've done wrong, we need to always turn back to God and ask for forgiveness. Just as a child will turn and say, oh, I'm sorry, please forgive me for doing that.

I am sorry. And if there's no discipline, if parents don't impose any discipline, there's no love, there's no care, there's no support.

[25 : 24] That's like the swimmer in the lane with those lane markings. Those boundaries. We all need boundaries. The swimmer needs boundaries. We need boundaries.

Children need boundaries. They need to know those boundaries of love and care and support. the loving discipline that those boundaries give to them.

Without discipline, it's cowardice and selfishness. The Lord disciplines those whom he loves. That's what Hebrews said, as I read earlier.

The Lord disciplines those whom he loves. Mums and dads discipline those whom they love. Next slide, please. He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored.

Ignoring good advice leads to hardship. Well, yes, many of us can put our hands up to that. When we haven't taken good advice and it's led to hardship for us.

[26 : 31] Refusing to be corrected is the path to failure. We need to be corrected. We need to be corrected. We need to take advice from one another. And if you're uncertain about something, go to another Christian.

Go to somebody here. Go to one of the leaders. Speak to somebody and say, I'm not sure. Is this right? Is this not right? I'm not quite sure. Go to somebody.

Don't get on the path to failure. As I said before, no one likes dealing with someone who is unteachable. And we need to have the ability to accept teaching in every area of our lives.

Education, work, relationships, and spiritual discipline. It's a lifestyle thing. To be disciplined in our lifestyles. You know, not to do things to excess.

Whatever that might be. Whether that's eating, drinking, too much exercise, too little exercise. It's about discipline.

[27 : 36] And again, it's not about restricting. It's about living in the best way within that discipline. And spiritual development. That brings us nicely around from the physical to the spiritual.

Let's move to the next slide, please. The New American Standard Bible, 1 Timothy 4, 7, says, Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.

Don Whitney, who's a professor of biblical spirituality, says, Spiritual disciplines are those practices found in the scriptures that promote spiritual growth among those who believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They are the habits. There we are, 18 to 254 days. From calm.com. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that God's people have practiced since biblical times.

Next slide, please. Richard J. Foster talks about 12 spiritual disciplines.

[28 : 45] And I just want to run quite quickly through these ones. And then there's three that I'll say a little bit more about. And these are confession, fasting, study, meditation, solitude, celebration, service, submission, and worship.

Confession. That's through which the wounds of our sins are forgiven. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

That's what confession is about. Fasting. We've had this not long ago. John, I think it was John or was it Andy? I can't remember. Spoke about fasting. I'm not going to touch on that other than to say it's a situation where we can concentrate upon God's work.

Study. We read. We read. We reflect. We absorb. And we apply the word that we're reading. God's word that we're reading. Meditation.

That's when we can be quiet and hear God's voice and obey his word. When we meditate on a piece of scripture, we can meditate on that.

[29 : 56] And listen for God speaking to us through that scripture, through that meditation. Solitude. Solitude. It's important to find a place of solitude, to be alone, to have aloneness with God and the silence to commune with God.

It's very difficult in a busy room or the television on or the radio is going to commune with God. Almost impossible. You need to have that aloneness with God, just you and God together, to commune with him.

Tell him all your hopes and dreams and fears, the things that you may not tell anybody else. Celebration. Walking and leaping and praising God.

It's what we do here at church. It's what we do at the quiz night that's coming along shortly. It's walking and leaping and praising God. It's about Christians getting together and having a lot of fun and some laughs.

Service. Service. We love. We relieve. We serve. We encourage. We give hope. That's what service is about.

[31 : 05] Loving and relieving. Helping others. Putting ourselves out for others. Doing to others. Submission. Laying aside our selfishness.

We're all selfish beings. We all want to do things for us. But we've got to lay that aside. And worship. That's why we're here this morning, isn't it?

Teaching, admonishing, singing, expecting. Expecting God to speak to us through our songs, through the word. However God wants to speak to us, he'll speak to us. And sometimes it's unexpected.

But God will speak to us if we're open to that. We open our hearts. God will speak to us. Next slide, please. And then the three.

Guidance, simplicity, and prayer. Guidance. We need to listen for guidance. When, before Whitby Christian Fellowship came along, a number of us met every week at our house.

[32 : 08] from various churches who were not happy in the churches we were in. We were seeking something different. And so one week we would do a Bible study and one week we'd do prayer.

And the prayer increasingly came around to a new work in Whitby, a new church in Whitby. And we were seeking guidance. And it was a hard time as we sought God's guidance on that.

And then eventually we heard of a group of people who'd come to Whitby to pray about a new church. They'd come from Gisborough Christian Fellowship, prompted by God to plant a church here in Whitby.

And three of us went along to hear about it at Stakesby School. Some of you, many of you have heard me say this before. And that's where Whitby Christian Fellowship began. And our guidance there became clear.

Yes, this is it. And we can hear guidance through all sorts of ways. Individually, corporately, through Scripture, through visions and dreams, or more than likely the still small voice of God, the divine shepherd.

[33 : 22] The still small voice of God in our hearts that we know is God speaking to us. And if we're not sure, then go to somebody else. It says, affirming corporately.

It doesn't mean just a group of people. Go to one person that you trust. Go to one of the leaders here and say, I think God is telling me to do this or to say that.

And I just want that confirming. It's always good to get it confirmed or affirmed by someone else. Simplicity. Inward reality resulting in an outward lifestyle.

Jen Johnson, who is part of the Bethel Music organization, says that simplicity is intentionally arranging our lives around God. And when I looked at this, it was quite interesting because there was a lot of talk around simplicity, around, you know, minimalist living and what have you.

And it's not about that. It can be about stripping everything back. Not letting all those material things impinge too much on your lives.

[34 : 31] Putting them in their proper place, which we can enjoy. Let's not, you know, let's not pretend we don't or shouldn't enjoy our material possessions. But giving them the right place in life.

Simplicity is about intentionally arranging our lives around God. What does God want first in our lives? And prayer.

Richard Foster calls it the living room of his heart. The living room of God. I like that. It's sort of that idea, isn't it? Of coming into somebody's living room, nice comfy seating, relaxed.

Taking it easy. It's a lovely picture, that, of being in God's sitting room and talking to him. Just one to one. Speaking to and listening to the open heart of God.

That's what that prayer is about. It's about speaking to and listening to the open heart of God. What a privilege that is, really.

[35 : 36] The almighty God, who threw the stars into space, who created everything we see, wants us to go and speak to him quietly in his living room.

And for those of you for whom prayer might be a new thing, then a simple acronym is ACTS.

So adoration is the A. Start off by giving adoration to God. Blessing him and praising him for who he is. Confession.

Confess your sins. Praise God for who he is. Confess your sins. Thanksgiving. Give thanks for all the things that God is doing for you.

All the things in your life that God is doing. The people he's brought into your lives. The situations, the circumstances, the relationships, the work, the leisure, whatever it might be.

[36 : 35] And then supplication. That's when you're asking God. Have those prayers that are on your heart. What do you want to ask God for? And that, as we know, those of us who have prayed for a long time, can be anything.

From the huge, you know, the Israel-Palestine conflict, for example, to the almost mundane.

And I'm not saying we should pray for a parking space, but I have to admit there are times when I have done it. So, acts.

Adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. That was what I was told when I first became a Christian. And it's been a very useful and good acronym for me. I can vouch for that.

Next slide, please. Don Whitney again says, the goal of practicing any given spiritual discipline, so the goal of practicing all of those spiritual disciplines, is not about doing as it is about being.

[37 : 43] Don Whitney could have written this, couldn't he? Being like Jesus, being with Jesus. He could have written that for us. Doing what Jesus did.

There it is. That's what it's about. It's about being like Jesus, being with Jesus. All those spiritual disciplines that we've just looked at. And then I just want to say one final thing.

We were talking this morning about mercy. And mercy. When you feel that you've stepped out of line, you've been indisciplined, you've done wrong, go to God.

Say you're sorry. And he will give you mercy because the word says, mercy triumphs over judgment. If you go to God and say, God, I'm sorry.

I've been indisciplined. I've done the wrong thing. God will grant you mercy because mercy overcomes judgment.

[38 : 48] And that's our God, a merciful God who just wants us to live our lives in freedom, in the freedom that discipline gives us to live our lives.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.