

**Teach Me Your Ways** Hebrews 12:5-17 [www.bible-sermons.org](http://www.bible-sermons.org) November 27, 2016

The first verses of this chapter presented us with a vision of the spiritual realm in the form of a Greek stadium. The people of faith who have gone before us are in the grandstands watching us run our race. We were exhorted to lay aside every weight and sin that would slow us from running all out with our eyes fixed on Jesus (Hebrew 12:1-2). We were asked to consider how He ran His race and what He endured for us. It ended with a reminder that we haven't shed a drop of blood yet (Hebrews 12:3-4).

The challenge to be more positive about our situation reminds me of the recent protests against the democratic process. Boo-hoo, they didn't get free college. I saw a sign that said new gear had arrived for the protestors. It was a box of pacifiers. I'm not bringing that up for a political commentary, but rather to point out what the author was getting at. We need to remember this when things turn in a direction we don't like. He's telling us we have been so blessed and have yet to shed a drop of blood, so why are we whining like the Jews in the wilderness? We can always find something to whine about, but there are a million times as many things for which to thank and praise God (Psalm 145:2-3). Our old nature prefers to complain. The new nature looks at the blessings and praises God. When you think things are just too tough, the author says, look at Jesus and remember what He went through for you. Get a new perspective to help you endure the difficult times.

The author continues with this theme by reminding us that difficulties are often God's way of helping us mature spiritually. *5 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.* Hebrews 12:5 He is asking if they forgot Proverbs 3:11-12. That is often our problem. We become anxious because we forget what God has declared in His Word (Hebrews 2:1). In some cases, we never read it in the first place. And if we did, did we meditate on it so as to apply it to our lives? You may have seen the interviews with random people who can tell you ten different brands of beer but can't name three of the ten commandments. There is a famine for the Word of God. It's not because the Word isn't available. It's because we put everything else before it. We don't recognize its incredible value. Even many who have been in church all their lives can't quote but three or four verses. It's no wonder there are so many weak and compromising Christians. We've ignored our spiritual nourishment (Colossians 3:16).

The author is telling the Hebrew believers that they should have remembered these verses from Proverbs and applied them to their situation. Instead of running from the persecution by compromising, they should look at it as an opportunity to grow spiritually because God will use it for their benefit. **Whatever your present or future crisis, the Biblical way to see it is as an opportunity to be strengthened in your faith** (Romans 5:3-5). Discipline in these verses can also be translated as "instruction." It isn't always the case that God is punishing us for some sin. Most of the time it is instruction, or we could translate the same word as "training." You probably remember a difficult class that had a lot of homework or reading assignments and you grew weary of the instruction. But when you completed the class, you felt a sense of

**Commented [PW1]: Hebrews 12:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,  
<sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

**Commented [PW2]: Hebrews 12:3-4 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.  
<sup>4</sup> In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

**Commented [PW3]: Psalm 145:2-3 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever.  
<sup>3</sup> Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

**Commented [PW4]: Hebrews 2:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

**Commented [PW5]: Colossians 3:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

**Commented [PW6]: Romans 5:3-5 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,  
<sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,  
<sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

accomplishment over what you endured and learned. In other words, "Tough it out! It's good for you." You didn't enjoy the process, but you are thankful for the results.

Don't become weary when you are being reproved by the Lord. "Reproved" can be translated as "corrected" or "convicted." How do we know if we are truly understanding if we are right or not if we don't receive God's correction? We should welcome correction. When we know the Lord loves us and is correcting us for our good, we should thank Him for His good corrections (Psalm 94:12). That is what the next verses point out.

*<sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. <sup>7</sup> 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? <sup>8</sup> If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.* Hebrews 12:6-8

What a privilege to be counted as a son or daughter of God (1 John 3:1)! With that privilege comes some spankings. The opposite of love is apathy. If God lets you get away with sin and just going down the road to destruction and damnation, it's because He knows you have hardened your heart to His pleading and will never be a part of the family of God. That is a frightening place to be. We should take God's correction, no matter how painful, as a sign of His great love for us. I'm so thankful the Lord doesn't let me get away with anything I clearly know is not His will. He quickly deals with me. We can all talk ourselves into compromise, but then the discipline comes and we know our justification was invalid. God help us to learn from the chastisement so we don't have to endure more painful chastisement. God help us to see it as His great love for us as sons and daughters of God.

We sometimes ask why some people seem to get away with the worst actions imaginable while promoting all kinds of evil. Why doesn't God smash them? Here is the answer. God doesn't bother disciplining them because they won't learn. They are just storing up wrath against Day of Wrath (Romans 2:5; Psalm 73:16-19). We should never envy them, but rather pity them. Behind the happy façade is often a life in turmoil and desperation to find some lasting satisfaction.

*<sup>9</sup> 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 and live? <sup>10</sup> 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.* Hebrews 12:9-10 Healthy family relationships are to teach us of spiritual relationships. A caring father will punish bad behavior for the child's good. If you were fortunate enough to have experienced that, you know what the author is saying. When mom said, "Wait till your father gets home!" your behavior suddenly improved and you prayed for her to have mercy and not tell your father just how disobedient you had been. You respected your father's love and discipline. How much more should we fear indulging the flesh and facing God's chastisement?

**Commented [PW7]: Psalm 94:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O LORD, and whom you teach out of your law,

**Commented [PW8]: 1 John 3:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

**Commented [PW9]: Romans 2:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

**Commented [PW10]: Psalm 73:16-19 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task,

<sup>17</sup> until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.

<sup>18</sup> Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin.

<sup>19</sup> How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!

Sometimes a parent may have impure motives, such as being embarrassed as to how you behaved in public, but God's motivation is always completely for your good. It is never selfish or self-serving. His anger is always balanced with His love and mercy.

It isn't coincidental that as the culture moves away from God it also moves away from discipline and denies responsibility for bad behavior. That isn't love; it's a lack of love. Many European countries have banned spanking outright. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has outlawed all physical discipline, even within families.<sup>1</sup> Of course excessive physical punishment without love can be damaging, but lack of discipline in love is resulting in what we see in our culture today. The nation is already reaping the consequences.

**God disciplines us for our good that we might share in His holiness.** Holiness is its own reward. Holiness is godliness. The benefits of holiness are peace, joy, calm assurance, and the most wonderful fellowship with God (Psalm 73:28). Somehow, our culture has painted holiness as a mystical state disconnected from interaction with the world, or the other extreme of excruciating sacrifice in the world. Holiness may take many different outward expressions, but at heart it is simply unity with God. It is loving God to the extent of putting Him first in everything, submitted to His will. Holiness is the blessed life. That is why Satan has so distorted the meaning and our idea of what that would look like. If we could see clearly what a blessing it is, we would be longing for holiness (Ephesians 4:24). We get a sense of it when we are deep in prayer or worship, but then life comes in like a flood and we often revert to just responding as we naturally would rather than in ways that are pleasing to God. Discipline breaks the cycle. It tells us God wants more for us than we desire for ourselves.

*<sup>11</sup> 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.* Hebrews 12:11 While we should thank God for discipline, it doesn't mean that we will enjoy it. If it wasn't painful we'd have no incentive to change our behavior. It hurts. Sometimes more than we think we can bear. But God knows what we need, and He loves us too much to let us go on in directions that would be detrimental to us. It is the fruit in our lives that He is after, and that fruit is the peaceful fruit of righteousness. It is peace with God and our fellow man. I think the Spirit called it the peaceable fruit because self-righteousness is often anything but peaceful. It demands its way and is quite contentious. But godly people are not contentious. Righteousness comes with humility and a servant's heart. That is rarely contentious. When it is, it is contentious for the sake of the abused and mistreated. It is reasonably contentious when lies are distorting important truths of who God is and His love for mankind, but always with grace and seasoned as so as to be palatable (Colossians 4:6). The peaceable fruit of righteousness is seen in those who have been disciplined and trained by God to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). It is pleasant to be around them. It is blessing to listen to them speak. True believers want to be like them, but we just don't want to go through the discipline they endured. Nevertheless, that is how the fruit is attained.

**Commented [PW11]:** <http://www.criminaldefenselawyer.com/resources/criminal-defense/criminal-offense/charges-that-can-be-brought-up-for-spanking-you#>

**Commented [PW12]: Psalm 73:28 (ESV)**  
<sup>28</sup> But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

**Commented [PW13]: Ephesians 4:24 (ESV)**  
<sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

**Commented [PW14]: Colossians 4:6 (ESV)**  
<sup>6</sup> Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

**Commented [PW15]: Galatians 5:16 (ESV)**  
<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, <sup>13</sup> and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.* Hebrews 12:12-13 The word "Therefore" is to tell us that what has been said before about the blessing of training and chastisement should result in encouragement. The Hebrew church was acting as if they were defeated, with their drooping hands and weak knees. He's telling them to lift them up. Lifted hands are a sign of praise (Psalm 119:48). **Go from feeling there is nothing you can do and move on to praising God for what He's about to do.** In other words, change your attitude and know God will see you through and that you'll grow spiritually through the process.

"Weak knees" is an expression that carried over into our day. We say someone is weak kneed meaning they lack boldness. He's saying buck up. Have some faith in God! Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power (Ephesians 6:10). Again, it's a change of attitude based on faith in God. The author was quoting Isaiah. The verse in Isaiah that follows his quote was meant to come to mind to encourage them. *<sup>4</sup> Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you."* Isaiah 35:4

Make straight paths for your feet so the lame won't get worse but will instead be healed (Proverbs 4:26-27). Set your course of action in a godly way, a straight way (Acts 13:10). Then those who can barely walk can follow you on that straight path. We set an example for others. The elders of that local Hebrew church should have been setting the example of going forward in faith and praising God in spite of the threats. Then the frightened flock will be cured of its immobility and be healed of their crippling doubt. That's easy for us to say here where our possessions and physical wellbeing are not threatened. The day may come when we need to accept the challenge that the author is giving them. Chapter eleven and twelve are a message to the persecuted church to trust God and face what comes with faith and calm assurance that God works all things together for good for the sake of His children (Romans 8:28). They may die for their faith, but that means they will receive an even better resurrection (Hebrews 11:35).

*<sup>14</sup> Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.* Hebrews 12:14 How we need to hear this! As I said earlier, Christians we can be so contentious, but we should be bringing an atmosphere of peace and reconciliation wherever we go (2 Corinthians 5:18). Let God do the convincing, not your arguments. Peace doesn't come easily. The world is out for personal gain and that brings conflict. We sometimes should take a loss just to keep the peace. When persecution did come, a good and peaceful relationship with their neighbors would benefit this church.

To strive is to doggedly pursue something. That should be applied to holiness as well. How eagerly are we pursuing holiness? We strive after financial security, pleasure, health, but are peace and holiness first? We pursue these goals by drawing near the Lord and being changed from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

*<sup>15</sup> 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;* Hebrews 12:15 For this

**Commented [PW16]: Psalm 119:48 (ESV)**

<sup>48</sup> I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes.

**Commented [PW17]: Ephesians 6:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

**Commented [PW18]: Proverbs 4:26-27 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure.

<sup>27</sup> Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.

**Commented [PW19]: Acts 13:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?"

**Commented [PW20]: Romans 8:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

**Commented [PW21]: Hebrews 11:35 (ESV)**

<sup>35</sup> Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.

**Commented [PW22]: 2 Corinthians 5:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;

**Commented [PW23]: 2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Hebrew church, works based efforts toward salvation were always a trap because of their history with the law. Grace was such a wonderful revelation (Hebrews 4:1; Galatians 5:4). When we fall into works, we become legalists who demand too much from others. Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy (Matthew 5:7), and how we all need mercy. So if you want grace, apply grace to others. Bitterness is refusing to pass on the very grace God has given you to others (Matthew 6:14-15). And when we do that, we defile many. Notice we are to see to it that the root doesn't spring up. Sometimes when we have been severely wounded it may take a long time to get rid of the root. We can be determined to forgive but the process may take time. During that time, see to it that it doesn't leaf out into words that would taint others attitudes toward the person who offended you (James 3:10). Guard your mouth (Psalm 141:3). That's where the root is most likely to spring forth and flourish with leaves that others can see. In this case the leaves are noxious and you can harm others with those words. Our words should always be full of grace (Colossians 4:6).

See to it that <sup>16</sup> *that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.* <sup>17</sup> *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.* Hebrews 12:16-17 At first this seems like a strange connection, sexually immoral and unholy Esau. However, if you recall the account of Esau, he sold his birthright for a passing physical desire (Genesis 25:32). His impulsive behavior, putting temporal physical desires before things of eternal value caused him lose the blessing. There was no way to get it back. Sin has consequences and some are unavoidable. Even if we repent, we often have to face them.

This Hebrew church is being exhorted to receive hardship that was coming with an attitude of thanksgiving, knowing that God would mature them in the process. We should hold to that instruction too. The passage is asking us to strive for peace and holiness instead of falling into the ways of the world. We are warned not to give in to bitterness but instead to give to others the grace we have received. And finally, we are warned not to give in to compromise for the sake of physical satisfaction, for the consequences might be those from which there is no recovery. Face the future with faith in Christ. Trust Him. It may be difficult, but He will see you through for your good and His glory. Our Abba Father is faithful! May His grace help us to be faithful to Him!

#### Questions

- 1 Review the verses that came before.
- 2 Why do we need to remember God's Word?
- 3 What is another translation for "discipline"?
- 4 Why should we welcome correction?
- 5 What happened to physical discipline?
- 6 Why does God discipline us?
- 7 What is holiness?
- 8 What is the fruit that comes from discipline?
- 9 What does verse 12 mean?
- 10 For what are we to strive? How?

#### Commented [PW24]: Hebrews 4:1 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.

#### Commented [PW25]: Galatians 5:4 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

#### Commented [PW26]: Matthew 5:7 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup> "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

#### Commented [PW27]: Matthew 6:14-15 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup> For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, <sup>15</sup> but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

#### Commented [PW28]: James 3:10 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

#### Commented [PW29]: Psalm 141:3 (ESV)

<sup>3</sup> Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!

#### Commented [PW30]: Colossians 4:6 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup> Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

#### Commented [PW31]: Genesis 25:32 (ESV)

<sup>32</sup> Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?"