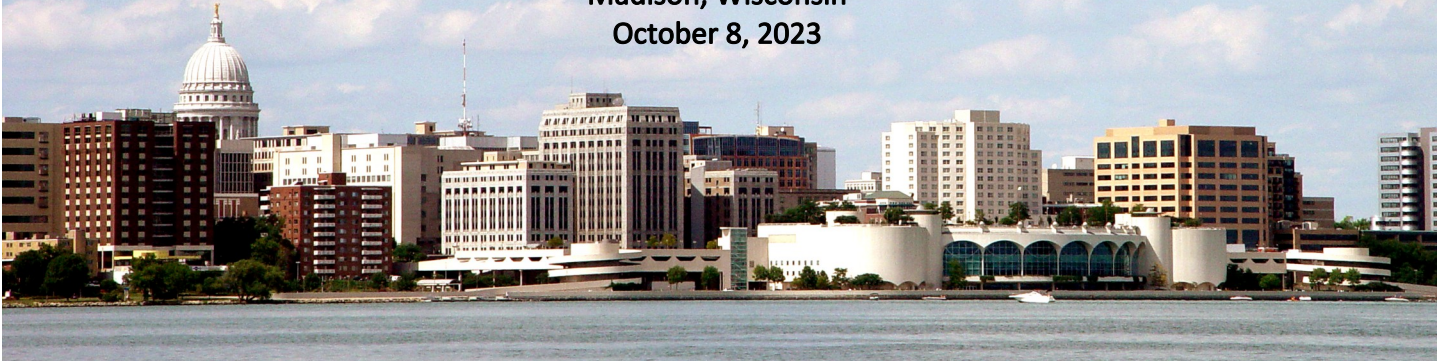


# When God's Discipline Hurts

Hebrews 12:3-11

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Good morning, and welcome to the Four Lakes congregation! If you are visiting this morning, we are glad to have you with us. We'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card online if you can (using the QR code up here or on the front of today's bulletin), or you can use one of the cards from the pew in front of you. Whatever works for you, we would love to hear from you, and we invite you to pass along any questions or prayer concerns.

Before we return to our study of Hebrews 12, we'd like to give just a brief overview of what God has done to save us. He sent his only Son to die in our place, to shed his blood for our forgiveness. He died on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up alive on the first day of the week. We respond to this good news through faith, repentance, confession, and baptism (a burial in water for the forgiveness of sins). And we have an example to share this morning, coming to us from the Palm Beach Lakes congregation down in Florida. They posted after their worship assembly last Lord's Day, and they simply say, "We rejoice with Sofia Buonadonna who was baptized into Christ yesterday after services. Please keep her in your prayers!" And we share this today as encouragement to those of you who have not yet obeyed the gospel. This is what it looks like, and if we can help in some way, this is one of the main reasons why we exist as a congregation, and we would love to help in any way possible. We invite you to get in touch.

This morning, we return to our study of Hebrews 12. The book of Hebrews, of course, is a message from an unknown author to a group of Christians who were starting to face some difficulties, and they were tempted to turn back. The theme of the book, then, is that "Jesus is Better," and he uses this theme to encourage them to endure, to hang on. And we have now come to the very practical part of this book. In Hebrews 11, he gives a series of examples, and moving into Chapter 12, he encourages the first hearers, the first readers of this message, to keep these heroes of faith in mind as they "*run with endurance*" the race that has been set before them.

And today, **\*\*PPT\*\*** we come to a passage where the author confronts the difficulties we may face in the Christian life, and he describes some of these painful experiences as "*discipline*" from the Lord. The word "*discipline*," in fact, is used nine times in this passage. The author, then, uses this concept to encourage God's people to respond appropriately to difficult circumstances. When we experience pain, how do we endure? When bad things happen to us, how do we respond? When hard times come, how do we run with endurance?

As we look at this passage, I think we'll come to understand that God sometimes uses difficult times to teach and to train and sometimes to correct. Sometimes, God can take what seems to be terrible at the time, and he uses it for good. And it goes back to this concept of **"discipline."** When most of us think of **"discipline,"** what comes to mind? I don't know about you, but I think of punishment. However, the word **"discipline"** is defined by various Greek scholars as "training," particularly with regard to the education of children, and it may include commands and admonitions, reproof, and even punishment. It refers to "correcting mistakes and curbing passions." So, although punishment may be a part of it, discipline is so much more than that. To discipline is to train or to teach, and the training may be difficult, even unpleasant at times.

And I think that most of us have experienced difficulties in life that we can look back on with a sense of clarity that only comes with time. And sometimes we realize that this difficulty actually turned out to bring us closer to the Lord – an illness, an accident of some kind, some kind of challenge at work, or perhaps even persecution. We know from the end of Hebrews 10 that these people had already **"...endured a great conflict of sufferings,"** they had been **"made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated."** In that context, they **"...showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of [their] property."** Not that God necessarily caused any of these things to happen, but he apparently used some unpleasant (even painful) events to teach or to train.

Even today, we understand that people will sometimes hire personal trainers to make them uncomfortable on purpose, to reach a goal of some kind. Some of you know that I see my personal trainer about once every two years, whether I need it or not! I first met Maurice Williams at Polishing the Pulpit maybe back in 2017. As I remember it, he had some kind of presentation about preachers and fitness, and he motivated me to make some serious changes back then. At that time, he owned his own fitness studio over in Washington, DC, and since then he's been hired on at Freed-Hardeman University as an associate professor of kinesiology. And that's how I see him once every year or two. I seek him out, and every time I see this man I thank him for saving my life. But here is a man who is extremely good at pushing people beyond what they think can do, and it may be uncomfortable for a bit, but it is for their own good. That is discipline, a difficulty that is meant to teach or to train.

This morning, then, as we continue in Hebrews 12, let's take a look at how to keep running, even when it hurts. How do we react when God's discipline hurts? The passage is Hebrews 12:3-11,

**<sup>3</sup> For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. <sup>4</sup> You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; <sup>5</sup> and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; <sup>6</sup> FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."**

**<sup>7</sup> It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup> But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup> Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?**

**<sup>10</sup> For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. <sup>11</sup> All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.**

This morning, as we move through this passage, let's start with what is basically a rebuke for these people's faint-hearted endurance (in verses 3-4), we'll move along with a series of practical commands or reminders, some things to remember when we face discipline (in verses 5-9), and then we'll wrap it up with a quick summary of some of the benefits of discipline (in verses 10-11).

**I. First of all, though, let's go back to verses 3-4, and let's notice what is basically an ENCOURAGEMENT.**

And the encouragement comes as he tells these people (as they suffer, as they are tempted to grow weary and lose heart) that they are to *"consider"* Jesus! When you are tempted to give up and turn back, consider Jesus! And specifically, think about what Jesus suffered. Think about the hostility Jesus endured, and use that as encouragement to *"not grow weary and lose heart."* So, don't necessarily think about your own troubles and your own weaknesses, but consider Jesus. Think about what he went through. Have you been crucified yet? If not, keep going!

And the other rebuke comes in the form of the reminder that these people *"have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood"* in their struggle against sin. And I think he's saying here: Remember, it could always be worse! We hesitate to think in those terms, but that really seems to be what he's saying: It could always be worse. And for Jesus, it was worse!

And wouldn't it help to think about Jesus whenever we face some difficulty? Whether the pain we're enduring is discipline, or punishment of some kind, or persecution, or maybe just something we don't even understand at the time, there is always a value to thinking of Jesus. When it hurts as we run the Christian race, consider Jesus! Whatever we may suffer for him, can in no way compare to what he has suffered for us. When we face any hardship, there may be a benefit to asking ourselves: Is this thing that I'm suffering worse than the cross or is it easier than the cross? Consider Jesus! There's a value in going back and reading those passages about Jesus being beaten, and spit upon, and insulted, and nailed to the cross. Consider Jesus!

And I think another reminder here is that not all suffering is the direct result of our own sin. Sometimes, when we suffer, we try to look for reasons: What did I do to deserve this? And with Jesus, he did nothing to deserve it! So, whenever we face any kind of pain or challenge that makes us want to give up, consider Jesus!

**II. As we continue in this paragraph, we come to a series of PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS, some things to keep in mind.**

And as he leads up to the first of these (which come in the form of two negative commands), he continues with something of a rebuke, when he says (at the beginning of verse 5), *"...and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons,"* and he quotes this passage from Proverbs (from Proverbs 3:11-12). So, as these people are right on the edge of giving up and giving in, he accuses them of having forgotten the word of God! So often, when life gets difficult, it is so easy to forget the basics, things like reading the Bible and prayer. You have forgotten, then, what the word of God teaches concerning how to respond to pain! And in this rebuke is where he starts with these two "do nots," these first two applications are things they are NOT to do when tempted to give up in hard times.

**A. First of all, based on this passage he quotes from Proverbs, he says, "DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD."**

In other words, when something uncomfortable happens in my life, there may be a value to asking: Is there something God may be trying to teach me through this? Now, this doesn't mean that every negative thing that

happens to me comes as some kind of discipline from God; however, I believe it's wise to at least ask the question. What might God be teaching me through this? Because, if we don't ask that question, I think we might risk ignoring some kind of wake-up call. Just a few examples here:

- Think about the prophet Jonah being thrown overboard in the storm and immediately swallowed by the great fish. There's probably a value to Jonah turning to God in that moment and asking, "Lord, is there something you're trying to tell me here? Of course, there's a chance this is just random, but is there something I need to be learning from this?"
- Or we might think about the prophet Balaam. You're going somewhere you shouldn't be going to deliver a message you shouldn't be delivering, and suddenly your donkey starts swerving off the road and pinning your leg against a rock, and after beating the donkey she starts talking to you. It seems to me that it would probably be wise to ask, "Lord, is there something I need to learn from this?"

And I know, these are rather obvious examples, but the reminder is that when uncomfortable things happen to us, there is a value to at least asking whether this may be a teachable moment: Could this be some kind of discipline or training sent to us by the Lord? Or is the Lord using this discomfort to teach us something (even if he didn't cause the discomfort in the first place)? Or does this event allow me to be more like Jesus in some way? Let's just be careful that we do not *"regard lightly the discipline of the Lord."*

**B. The second application in this passage also comes in the form of negative command as the author suggests that we are not to "FAINT" or "LOSE HEART" when we are reproved by the Lord.**

And to me, these first two *"do not"* commands almost seem like two sides to the same coin. On one hand, don't just dismiss the Lord's discipline, but on the other hand, don't give up under it either. There are times when we face difficulties when we might be tempted to just collapse, to give up, "forget it, I've had enough." Some may turn to alcohol, some may turn to other distractions like technology or constant entertainment of some kind. But it's the idea that what I'm going through is just too much to handle. So, it's not that we are disregarding the Lord's discipline, but it's that his discipline is too much to bear. We might think of a kid who's been grounded from a cell phone for a day or two, "It's too much to handle! Life is no longer worth living!" But there's a danger that we might react that way. Instead of asking the Lord what we might be able to learn from this event, perhaps we just give up under the pressure. Or we might think of a team roster that gets smaller and smaller throughout the season. Along the way, some will give up; some will come to the conclusion, "This is too hard; this is not for me." The same goes for piano lessons or any number of things. But the command here is: Do not give up on running the Christian race like that!

And the author of Hebrews gives the reason for not giving up and not dismissing the Lord's discipline in this reminder from Proverbs that *"those whom the Lord loves he disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives."* We will get back to this in just a moment – basically, don't assume that God hates you, because the opposite is true – but for now, when hard things happen to us, we are not to dismiss those potential lessons from the Lord, and we are not to faint under those trials. Do not ignore what God is teaching, and do not quit during the lesson.

**C. The third practical application in this passage seems to actually come in the form of a reminder, and the reminder (in verses 7-8) is that DISCIPLINE ACTUALLY PROVES THAT GOD LOVES US – DISCIPLINE PROVES THE RELATIONSHIP.**

In fact, discipline is actually reason to endure, because through discipline we realize that God is dealing with us as his children. And a lack of discipline would that God does NOT love us. And we know this from our own experience. Men who are truly fathers discipline their children. And again, we're not just talking physical punishment, but we're talking about all of it – teaching, training, correction, and everything that goes along with it. When we love our children, we discipline them.

Maybe some of you have had the experience that I've had: We observe a child out in public somewhere, and the child clearly needs to be on the receiving end of some discipline. Maybe it's screaming, or rude or abusive behavior toward a parent, and it's bad. And as a dad, I'm thinking to myself, "I'm pretty sure I know what should happen here." But I dare not step in! Why? Because that child is not my responsibility. Well, the opposite of that is we do have a responsibility to train and discipline our own children, because we love them. When we love our children, we put in the time and effort. So also with God. When God takes the time to teach us a lesson, he does that because he loves us. Discipline, then, is proof that God loves us. Discipline proves that we are a part of God's family. Discipline proves the relationship.

Years ago, my wife worked for the county Human Services department, working with children with severe emotional and behavior disorders, and her goal was to either keep them out of the psychiatric hospital or to transition them from the hospital back into the community. And often, I remember her saying that it wasn't the kids who needed to be in the hospital, it was the parents. Some parents have no concept of consistent discipline motivated by love. So many times, the parents were the ones who needed some training in setting boundaries and delivering some consistent consequences. As a part of her job, she would provide some respite care, and we would take these kids into our home for the weekend, we would take them to church with us, we would take them out to eat, demonstrating, "This is how you function in a civilized society," because they weren't getting that at home. And so many times, we wished that we could just take them in permanently, providing some sense of stability in their lives. By the way, I remember reading a study maybe 30 years ago, where researchers discovered that kids who grew up in a fenced-in yard ended up with higher IQ's. Isn't that weird? But the conclusion of the study was that children need boundaries. Kids do better when they have some limits and when they have a sense of safety and security within those limits. So also, as our Father, God has provided us with both boundaries and consequences for pushing those boundaries. As a loving Father, he knows what's best for us.

You know what happens when kids don't have loving parents at home? Chaos! And we see it all around us. We see it in our schools right now. We see it in society. We see it in shootings, and stabbings, and carjackings. We see it in brutal attacks and sexual assaults. And so many of these can be traced back to a lack of discipline – no loving father in the home. God, though, loves us, and his love is demonstrated through discipline. So, when we face what we think might be God's discipline, let's remember that he loves us.

**D. The final practical application in this passage is that our job is to RESPOND TO GOD'S DISCIPLINE WITH RESPECT.**

He says (in verse 9), *"Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?"* So, we have a comparison: Just as we respected the discipline of our earthly fathers, so also it is even more important that we submit ourselves to God's discipline. So, there's a lesson on submission. God is God, and we are not.

What does this look like in practical terms? If I'm facing some difficulty in life that seems as if it might be discipline from the Lord, I need to pray about that. Pray for peace. Pray for healing. Pray for that difficulty to be resolved. But I should also be confessing my sin to the Lord. And I need to be asking the Lord if there's

some connection. And if I repent and that difficulty passes, great. If that difficulty does not pass, keep praying. In all things, we submit ourselves to God.

III. **As we come to the end of this passage, let's close by thinking about a few BENEFITS OF DISCIPLINE (and we see these outlined for us in verses 10-11).**

A. **And the first benefit is that God DISCIPLINES US FOR OUR GOOD.**

We might appreciate how he starts this with something of a disclaimer, for our earthly fathers *"disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them."* I think he recognizes that earthly fathers do make mistakes. Earthly father may not have all the information. Earthly fathers may have had a bad experience with their own fathers. Earthly fathers may be tired or exasperated or angry or embarrassed or even lazy sometimes. I know some of you here this morning hear *"fathers"* and *"discipline,"* and it's terrible. You had a bad experience there. Not all earthly fathers are good. However, most INTENDED their discipline for good.

And that's one of the main goals of discipline – it's for our own *"good."* As parents, we try to teach our children the value of hard work, for example. And so we have them take out the trash, and mow the grass, and clean the kitchen, and sweep the garage. I think of our daughter when she was 3 or 4 years old. There was silence, and silence isn't always good when you're dealing with a toddler. But after a while, she stepped out of the upstairs bathroom holding a toilet brush. The brush was wet, she was wet, and when we went upstairs, we found the entire bathroom dripping wet. She had been dipping that brush in the toilet and had scrubbed every surface in the bathroom with it – the tub, the sink, the walls, everything! Sometimes, it's easier to do some of those cleaning chores ourselves, but there is a value to learning. And doing some cleaning around the house isn't necessarily a punishment, but chores are training (or discipline). And they may be unpleasant at the time, but as parents we train our children for their own good. So also, we make them go to school when they don't want to, and we make them do their homework, and we make them take a bath every once in a while, and we make them go to bed at a decent hour, and so on. This is for their own benefit. And if they lie or steal, we establish consequences – not because we're mean, but for their own good. I think of the time when I was 5 or 6 years old, and our family went to some kind of store down in Crystal Lake, Illinois, where they had a huge pallet of individually wrapped gumballs. I asked my dad if I could have one, and he said no. Well, on the drive home, dad heard chewing in the back seat. I had stolen several of those gumballs. I don't remember everything that happened next, but I do remember sitting on the couch with dad having a conversation about how we don't steal, and then we went back to the store, and we paid for those gumballs while I apologized to the store manager. A learning experience for sure! Well, just as our earthly parents discipline us for this life, God disciplines to prepare us for the next, for our eternal good.

B. **And this is closely tied to the benefit that comes at the end of verse 10, "SO THAT WE MAY SHARE HIS HOLINESS."**

To be holy is to be separate from the world, different, set apart for some special purpose. God trains us, then, to share in his holiness, to be holy like he is (in at least some sense). This world wants us to conform, to be just like they are. The world wants us to think that we are being courageous and different, when in fact they want us to be just like them. Several years ago, I remember seeing a headline (perhaps from the Babylon Bee, a satire site), but it said something like, "MAN COURAGEOUSLY CHANGES HIS BELIEFS TO BELIEVE EXACTLY LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE IN THE WORLD BELIEVES." That is not courage, is it! But God disciplines us so that we can share in his holiness, so that we can be truly different, or set apart from the world. In 1 Peter 1, Peter talks about facing various trials, and those trials proving and refining our faith like gold in a fire, resulting in the

salvation of our souls. That's the holiness that comes as a result of God's discipline. We face some discomfort, we adjust, and we are better for it.

**C. And this brings us to the last verse, where discipline is said to "YIELD THE PEACEFUL FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS."**

It sure doesn't seem very joyful at the time, he says, but he compares it to growing fruit. I hate pruning. You're supposed to prune in the dead of winter, and at first it doesn't make sense to help a tree grow by whacking it, but I've learned over the past 40 years that pruning helps a tree yield fruit, and it takes time. When we first built our home in Madison 23 years ago, the first thing we did was to plant some fruit trees, even before we planted grass, I believe. And we did this because trees take time. Those trees needed as much time as possible until they could bear fruit. So also with us.

So, these are some benefits of God's discipline.

**Conclusion:**

This morning, we've defined discipline as training. It may involve teaching, correction, or even punishment at times, and it's not always pleasant. Above all, when we face some unpleasant circumstance in life, we consider Jesus (comparing our suffering to his), but then we wrestle with it: We don't dismiss what we're going through, and we certainly don't give up, but remembering that God loves us we respond to difficulties with respect (making sure we submit ourselves to what God might be doing in our lives). And through it all, we trust that God is shaping us for our own good, to share in his holiness, and to bear the peaceful fruit of righteousness over time.

Before we get ready to partake of the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

We praise you this morning as a loving Father, and we trust that you always want what's best for us. When difficult things happen to us, we pray that we would look at those difficulties with wisdom, always turning to you, regardless of the cause. And if you are, in fact, trying to shape our faith through a difficult experience, we pray for the courage to always do what is right, trusting you along the way.

Thank you, Father, for Jesus. We come to you in his name. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)