

The Race

Hebrews 12:4-11

- So we as a church have been walking through the book of Hebrews together this year
- And we're getting close to the end of our study, and we've entitled this portion of the book of Hebrews "The Race"
- Because the writer starts off this chapter by encouraging us to run with endurance and perseverance the race of life that is set before us
 - And like we talked about the week before last, this life can be an agonizing race at times
 - No run is ever comfortable, it puts a strain on the body, and the reward only comes after the race is over
 - But until our life comes to an end on this side of eternity, we still have this race to run...and

the writer of Hebrews is giving instructions on how to best endure.

- The week before last we looked at the writers teaching about how suffering and hardship can be a tool to mold us and strengthen us, and how we can be trained to endure like an athlete trains for a competition.
- But in verse 4, he begins to give us another way to view the hardships of life:
 - ***"In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 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 [rebuked] by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives." -Hebrews 12: 4-6 (ESV)***
 - Discipline. It's a difficult subject for a lot of parents, especially young parents. We want to learn from what we experienced growing up and be better than our parents were.

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- (Because that should be the goal of parenthood, for your kids to be better than you)
- And I'm not here to take any strong stances or cause any trouble, I don't know how you all feel about it in 2024...but I was spanked as a child. And because of it I've grown up to suffer from a condition known as "Respect for Others"
 - To be clear...I was never beaten... I was spanked.
 - I was a thick headed child. I would lie about everything.
- For example: When I was very small I had a problem with eating butter.
 - *And my mom or dad would go in the kitchen, see the butter dish a mess and the butter all mishapen...and they would yell! "KENNY! Were you in the butter again!" And I would walk in with grease and butter all over my hands and face, saying, "No daddy! Wasn't me!"*
- *I would do it so much, my oldest sister would find me on the counter, eating the butter, and would clean me up and try to remold the butter before my parents saw!*
 - I was a child that wouldn't think through the consequences of my actions and I needed strong discipline.
 - If my lying was not disciplined and disciplined strongly, I would grow up to be a what?....a liar!
 - Therefore I would grow up to be someone that could not be trusted, and someone who would never trust anyone else. Because that's what liars do, they know how untrustworthy they are and just project that onto everyone else as well. And they live miserable, lonely lives.
- My parents didn't want that for me. So I needed discipline.
- And I'm thankful for the strong discipline that my parents cared enough about me to give.

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- But at the time, as a child I didn't fully understand, and it was going to take an entire childhood for me to learn to think about the consequences of my actions before I do something.
 - I remember when I was in school, I would get in trouble, and they would send a pink slip home with me
 - And the moment that the principle would give me that slip to take home for my parents to sign...I would be sick the rest of the day
 - I couldn't eat, I couldn't play at recess, I couldn't think about anything other than the impending doom that was coming my way
 - I would pray that the bus ride home would never end
 - And then when I got home I would muster up the courage to show the pink slip to my mom, hoping that she would just deal with it herself.
- But inevitably, she would tell me the 5 most terrifying words that a son could ever hear from his mother.
 - Wait. Till. Dad. Gets. Home.
 - Then I would just sit on the couch for the next couple of hours just staring into the tv, not actually watching anything that's on the screen.
 - And then dad gets home, and he immediately knows somethings wrong because I don't greet him at the door. Then mom goes over and shows him the pink slip from the principle, and my stomach is now completely in my throat as he tells me the 5 most terrifying words a son could ever hear from his father:
 - Go. Wait. In. My. Room.
 - And I felt like the waiting in the room was worse than the actual spanking. The waiting with the anticipation building, what was this some sort of psychological torture???

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- But what I came to understand once I got older was that my dad didn't make me go wait in his room to be cruel.
- No, he made me wait in his room so he could cool off.
 - Because he didn't want to spank me angry.
- He didn't want to discipline out of emotion
 - He needed time to process, to calm down, to pray, and prepare himself
 - And he hated having to discipline his children, he got no joy out of it, and he needed to think through the appropriate punishment and the conversation we needed to have afterward so he could help me process and learn.
- And no matter how well my father explained to me the why's of the discipline, I did not have the wisdom and the foresight yet to see the big picture.
- And I made life so hard on my dad, because even being the youngest, I got disciplined more than all 4 of my siblings combined!
- Because I needed to be trained by the discipline.
- And it wasn't just that fact that I was disciplined...it was *how* I was disciplined.
 - Not talking about the method of discipline, it was about the heart
 - I was disciplined out of the heart and care of my father who wanted the best for me.
- Who, no matter how taxing it was on him emotionally, he desperately wanted me to grow up to be a man of integrity.
- I needed to be trained to be a man that would think through the consequences of his actions.
- Now my dad wasn't perfect, he made mistakes. But he did his best.

- The writer of Hebrews gives us this illustration as another way to view the hardship that we experience in this race of life.
- He says in verse 7, ***“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? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 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? 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. 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 12:7-11 (ESV)
- That word **“Trained”** is the greek word **(gymnazō): to exercise vigorously, in any way, either the body or the mind**
 - You go to the gym, in order to put organized stress on the body, to inflict helpful pain on yourself, in order to improve your weaknesses, correct?
 - That’s what the writer says that discipline is.
- One of the best definitions of discipline I’ve heard is: **“Discipline is Designed non-destructive, instructional pain.”**
 - Whether it be disciplining the body, or disciplining a child
 - Whether it is the pain of infliction, the pain of withholding something, the pain of taking something away...and we as parents know the pain that discipline can inflict on our children
 - And we lose sleep over trying to figure out the balance of having to administer the pain discipline...and making sure that its not too

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strong that it's destructive but still strong enough to be instructional

- And we spend so many years trying to figure out the right balance, and every kid is different and respond to discipline differently, needs to be disciplined differently.... and we're so in over our heads!!
- And the writer of Hebrews says that our human parents tried their best...if we had good parents, they did their best, but their best will always fall short
- But God actually knows what's best. He is what's best. And we can trust that His discipline is perfect.
 - He knows exactly what to allow or bring into your life to teach you exactly the thing that you need to learn.
 - And it will never be too strong, but it'll never be easy either

- And God's discipline is not something we like to talk about much, or think about...and it's been abused in many legalistic circles.
 - And the reason that we struggle with it, is because we think we're bigger than we are.
- We are God's children. And we love to say that in a very kumbaya-ish sort of way.
 - But the reality is we are God's children. And because we are children, we are, often times, winy, defiant, thick-headed, spoiled children that are in need of discipline.
 - More often than not, we're the 4 year old that thinks we're 18 already, or the teenager that thinks that they're 30
 - We don't know what's best for ourselves, even though we think that we do! But God wants the best for us.
- And we fail to realize that so many times in our lives, we are nothing but the toddler reaching toward the stove.

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- *It's bright, it's red, it looks pretty, and we want to touch it*
- *And at first we get yelled at, "NO!!"*
- *And we're confused...why you yelling at me like this? It's pretty, its warm, I want to touch it!*
- *So we reach again, and this time we get our hand popped...and we kick and we scream and we cry. "Why can't I have the things that I want!?"*
- And there are times in our lives where things aren't falling into place, going the way we wanted, or things seemingly start to go against us...and sometimes we blame the enemy of attacking us
- But sometimes, the writer of Hebrews suggests, it might be the discipline of the Lord not letting you get what you want because He doesn't want you to get burned.
- He can see the consequences, He can see the danger, He can see the end results that you don't have the wisdom and maturity to see yet.
- And He knows that the instructional pain of popping your hand, is going to be far less than the pain of your hand getting burned
- I was talking to my dad this week and he explained: "When you ran away from me and I yelled for you to stop. I needed you to fear what would happen if you didn't listen to me. And it wasn't because I wanted you to be obedient and well behaved...it was because I knew you didn't have the foresight to fear the car coming 70 mph down the road you were running toward."
- There's reason why Proverbs says, ***"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight"***
-Proverbs 9:10 (ESV)
- You see, whenever I began to fear when dad would yell...I was beginning to get wisdom,

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because I was beginning to think through the consequences of my actions

- And I began to have true insight when I began to know his heart behind the discipline.
- Now, this may sound like a sermon on parenting, but its actually a sermon on children-ing
 - Because the context of this passage is how we are to see and respond to the discipline of our Father.
 - We, as children, are not to make light of the Lord's discipline on us...and the main reason why we lack wisdom as children of God is because we have lack our Fear of the Lord.
 - We should fear the consequences of disobeying God.
- And it's not that we should be scared or terrified of God...we do not fear punishment from God. Jesus already absorbed the punishment for us on the cross.

- Just as the song says, "And on the cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied."
- Therefore, God does not punish us as His children
- The purpose of Punishment is to bring Pain
- The Purpose of Discipline is to make well.
- The literal definition of the word for "**Discipline**" used in this passage means "**to train, to cause one to learn, to mold the character of**"
- We should always know without a doubt, that whatever discipline the Lord brings into our lives, the purpose of it is not to inflict pain on us, the purpose of it is to make us better.
- We should know God's heart for our ultimate good!
- But we should have a healthy fear of the discipline.
- We should fear the consequences of defying Almighty God!

- Because that is when discipline gets administered.
- It's one of the best pieces of parenting advice I've ever gotten, "You discipline defiance, not annoyance."
 - A good parent doesn't discipline simply because they are annoyed by their child, or their child does something to embarrass them in public.
 - Discipline becomes necessary when a child defies their parents instruction for their good.
- Therefore we as God's children, should have enough insight to know that He is the All-Powerful, All-Knowing, God of the Universe, Creator of Life... and we should have enough awe and reverence of Him to accept His correction when we need it.
- And there should be a healthy fear in us, to not want to defy His prescribed way of life
- Because I know that if I go against His ways, things are not going to go well for me!
- And not because He'll punish me, but because He's always trying to get me to see what's best for me, and when I ignore Him, the only result is getting burned.
- That's why the writer reminds the Hebrews of the famous passage in Proverbs, which says, ***"My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent His rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, as a father [disciplines] the son He delights in."*** -Proverbs 3:11-12 (NIV)
- **He Disciplines because He Delights in You**
- God delights in you as His child, He wants the best for you as His child, and He expects great things from you as His child.
 - Therefore, if you are His child, He's not just going to let you get away ungodliness.
 - He will discipline it. Because you are His child, made in His image, being conformed to His likeness...so that sin or ungodly traits

that you are carrying are not who you are anymore.

- I remember my mom used to remind us before we left the house, **“Remember who you are, and Who’s you are.”**
- Remember that you are a child of God, you belong to Him, you represent Him.
- Therefore God’s not just going to let you get away with anything
 - If you have a problem with pride, He’s going to deal with that pride
 - If you have a problem with control, He’s going to break you of that
 - If you have a problem with unrepentant sin, He’s going to address it
- Because you are His child, He knows who you are and your identity more than you do
- And He cares enough about you to not let you go down a destructive path without intervening Himself.

- And I don’t care how solid or consistent of a Christian any of us feel like we are, we all have areas in our lives that we still need to grow, and we are all still children that need loving discipline.
- So what does Discipline from the Lord look like?
- Well proverbs and Hebrews kind of give us 3 levels of this discipline.
- So to go back to Hebrews, the NIV says: **“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you,” -Hebrews 12:5b (NIV)**
- Here we see the first aspect here is:
 - **GOD’S CARING REBUKE**
- This something we could experience just about every day
- And I believe that this is mostly fleshed out through the conviction of the Holy Spirit

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- Jesus said in John chapter 16 that one of the Ministries of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgement
- So simply put, the Holy Spirit is the divine moral compass within us letting us know, *“That’s the wrong way, this is the better way, and here are what the consequences could be if you don’t listen.”*
- You could see this played out whenever you are having a disagreement with someone. It could be a spouse, a friend, a sibling, or even someone you don’t even know
 - You find yourself in the midst of a heated disagreement and you want to lash out in anger...But then you feel something inside of you making you pause. And you know lashing out in anger is the wrong course of action, the right course of action would be to remain peaceful or ask forgiveness, but if you ignore that and lash out in anger anyway you could fracture the relationship.
 - And at a moment, the Holy Spirit helps you process all of that in the hopes that you’ll make the better decision
- And it takes some practice of recognizing the voice of the Holy Spirit in our lives and to be obedient to His voice.
- Because whenever that conviction comes, everything within us wants to do the opposite, that’s why the rebuke is necessary
- I see it with Fletcher all of the time right now. He can be grabbing for something, going toward something, or climbing on something that could hurt him...and I have to yell, give a rebuke, get my dad voice in full force in order to get him to pause.
- And most of the times it confuses him, because he doesn’t see the dangers of what he is doing like I can see them
- And when that happens, he gives 1 of 3 responses:

- 1. He just stops and then does something else
- 2. He breaks down crying
- 3. He ignores me and does it anyway
- And these are the same 3 responses we give to God whenever He has to rebuke us.
- The hope is that we will learn to trust the Father's rebuke. Stop and turn because we know He's just looking out for us
- But sometimes we throw a tantrum.
 - This is why the writer says to not lose heart, or to not grow weary of the Lord's rebuke
- *Because it's ok, that you and I do not fully know what's best for us*
 - It's ok, to just be God's child that is still learning and growing
 - It's ok, if you're wrong about something.
- Because you can be doing something the wrong way with the right heart.
- There are times where you are not intentionally wanting to be disobedient to God, you're not intentionally wanting to do something the wrong way
- But you feel the Lord's rebuke, and it throws you off a bit, because you just didn't have the experience or the foresight to know that you were doing things the wrong way
- And you don't have to beat yourself up about it. Because you are experiencing conviction, not condemnation.
- The enemy will try and get you to think that those 2 are 1 in the same, but they couldn't be more opposite
 - Conviction builds you up, Condemnation beats you down
 - Conviction makes you better, Condemnation makes you bitter
 - Conviction is for your good, Condemnation tells you — you are no good

- But Paul is very clear that there is therefore now NO condemnation for those in Christ Jesus
- So God in His Grace and His love and His care, will rebuke you, to make you pause and realize that there is a better way.
- So you don't have to have the melt down when you experience conviction
- But the third response is what requires further discipline. And that is when we ignore the rebuke and do it anyway.
- ***“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when [rebuked] by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves,”-Hebrews 12:5-6a (ESV)***
- So if we do not listen to His caring Rebuke, then we could experience:
 - **GOD'S LOVING DISCIPLINE**
 - Like we said before, God loves you too much, to just let you get away with everything
 - If He did, He wouldn't be a good father and the writer of Hebrews goes as far as to say, that if we never experience discipline from the Lord, than we are illegitimate children!
- He— as a good Father, has to help mold our character, train us for godliness...and if everything is always easy, if we always get away with everything, if we always get our way...we would never learn, we would never grow, and we would be miserable entitled individuals.
- Again in verse 11, ***“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 (ESV)***
- Now, this is kind of a difficult subject to preach on because I cannot give you, exactly what the

Lord's discipline is going to look like in your life and in your situations.

- Just like with kids, I cannot discipline Fletcher the same way you would discipline your kids, I can't discipline him the same exact way that my dad disciplined me!
 - Fletcher with the coffee...thank God he's not like his daddy was!
- Everyone is different, with different personalities, with different temperament, that need different types of discipline
 - My 4 siblings didn't need to be spanked as much as I was spanked...Rachel's parents could spank her, because when they tried she would look them dead in the eye and say... "It didn't hurt..."
 - They had to find alternative ways of discipline for her
- But the point is not about the method of discipline, the point of this passage is about the purpose of discipline.

- And the writer says, the purpose of Discipline is to yield the peaceful fruit of Righteousness...
 - That means to have the peace and profit of being acceptable to God
 - Verse 10 says it's so why may share in His holiness!
- Keep in mind that the writer is writing to a group of believers, who some are most likely dealing with sin and immaturity...that's why in chapter 4 he tells them they need milk like infants
- However, these are also believers that are facing extreme persecution
- And it sounds strange, but the writer is encouraging these believers who are fearful for their lives, who are being beaten and imprisoned for their faith, who are having their families torn apart and excommunicated from their communities
- ...he tells them to think of these hardships as discipline from the Lord?

- How can that be encouraging? And if we take this out of context, it could lead us to think that every difficulty, and trial, and hardship we face is some sort of God's punishment on us
 - But we've already covered that's not the case
- And that is why it is so crucial to understand that the point is not about the method, it's about the purpose
- And the purpose of discipline is not to inflict pain...the purpose is to make us better, to mold our character
- Remember Romans 5, that says, ***“We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,” -Romans 5:3-4 (ESV)***
- So the writer is encouraging his readers and all of us, that whenever we do experience suffering and hardship...a way to endure it is to view it as discipline
- And the only way that is helpful is if we focus less on the suffering and more on what God could be teaching us through the suffering
 - In what ways Do we need to be molded?
 - In what ways do we need to be trained?
 - In what ways can I cut more sin out of my life through this?
- The writer is suggesting that our suffering can be a tool that God uses in order to mold us into becoming who He has called us to be.
- The goal of discipline is not to fear the discipline, it is to focus on ourselves
 - Discipline is to lead me to think about my actions, and how I can be better
 - In what ways can I grow?
 - What can I learn from my mistake, or situation?

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- Now the question is, does God personally cause the suffering, in order to teach you a lesson?
 - Maybe... sometimes.
- I was talking with someone recently that said that they had been on the go so much, not resting at all, they felt like the Lord was telling them to slow down and take a break, but they wouldn't listen.
 - Then eventually this person got sick and wasn't able to do anything for about 3 days.
 - And they viewed that as the Lord's discipline by making them slow down.
- Now, did God actually, personally, inflict that person with sickness to get them to listen, or was it just the natural result of lack of rest.
 - I don't know, we'll find out when we get to heaven one day...
 - But the person was viewing the situation in a healthy way...because they weren't crying over the sickness and focusing on that, they were listening for the Lord and learning something through it
- Now, in the case of the Hebrews persecution, absolutely not.
 - They are having evil acts from other people being done to them. God cannot and will not lead a person to sin against another person. James is very clear, God does not tempt anyone.
- However, there are times when God administers strong discipline.
 - I think of Paul on the Damascus Rd, He had to be blinded and confronted by the booming voice of God for God to get his attention
- This is what the writer of Hebrews is referring to in verse 6 he says: ***“For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives.” -Hebrews 12:6 (ESV)***
- So we had God's caring rebuke, His loving Discipline, and now His:

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- **GOD'S DRASTIC DISCIPLINE**

- Again, I can't tell you what that would exactly look like in your life, but I can encourage you to just listen to the rebuke, and don't let it get that far
- Because whenever you are His child, He's only going to let you go so far until He pulls you back.
 - And that pull is never comfortable
- And I can't tell you what that exactly looks like, but I can tell you what it looked like for me...
- I had very loving and caring parents, who raised me in the way I should go.
- I accepted Jesus in Easter of 1996, I'll never forget it, I know without a doubt that I became His child at that moment.
- However, it would be many years until I really followed Him
- And as I got older into my teenage years, I began to live a life I knew to be contrary to my

upbringing, and to the values of the Holy Spirit that lived with me.

- And at times I would feel the conviction and the rebuke of the Holy Spirit, but I got really good at tuning it out
 - And there would be discipline along the way, I really believe God wouldn't let me get away with stuff for too long
 - But they still just felt like little pops on the hand, and I would ignore those as well
- So I needed to be chastised
 - And it happened on the day I got arrested for the 2nd time. And I'm telling you, that day makes no sense.
 - I got arrested for something that no one would get arrested for today
 - Even then, it was something that they would have been just taken back to the station and had someone pick them up.
 - Maybe would have resulted in a fine.

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- But I got taken to prison. Not jail. A legitimate prison. I was on a cell block with guys that had decade long sentences.
 - And looking back on that night, and how we got caught, where we got caught, what we got caught with, and what happened because of it....it makes no sense!
- *It's not even a cool story. What'd you do?*
- But the only thing that makes it make sense is the Lord's Drastic Discipline
- I needed it to be that dramatic, for me to finally wisen up and realize something needs to change! And start listening to and following my Heavenly Father...accepting His correction
 - And I've never been the same since.
- So my encouragement would be, don't let it get to that point
- Just listen to the Rebuke...and don't lost heart and grow weary just because you're a child of God still learning and growing
- The way I see it, I, and others like me have experienced the Drastic Discipline of the Lord so you don't have to!
- Just understand that He want's the absolute best for you, He knows the absolute best for you, and He doesn't want you to get burned.