

# 7 Questions About God's Discipline

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Hebrews chapter 12, I want to read verses 5 through 13. “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. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises (KJV, NKJV, NASB, all put scourge. It sounds a little more severe than chastise, right? Scourge. Scourge sounds severe. And that’s what this word means.) God chastises every son whom He receives.’ 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. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.”

The title of my sermon this morning is “7 Questions About God’s Discipline.” Christian, I want you to think about your heavenly Father. I mean, you know this, but think about it. There’s nothing hidden. The deepest recesses of your mind, your soul, your thoughts, they’re not hidden. Every aspect of your life is fully exposed. He knows it. He is intimately familiar with what is going on in your life and exactly where you’re at. He knows your thoughts, He knows your desires, He knows your struggles, He knows your maturity or lack thereof. He knows your vulnerability, He knows spiritually on what level you now are, He knows your sin, He knows your failures, your levels of worldliness. And He knows precisely and perfectly. He knows when, and how hard, to apply pain to your life. Perfectly.

Make no mistake about it. If you are a child of God, if you are Christian, you will, and do, and have known God’s discipline. If you are a child of God, it’s given. No Christian escapes it. None. And I know this from our text. Verse 6, “The Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son (and of course, that is a generic son — that’s sons and daughters) every son whom He receives.” Verse 7, you look at the last sentence there, “For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?” What’s the answer? I mean, he is expecting you to answer it. What son is there whom his father does not discipline? None. Verse 8, “If you are left without discipline,” What does it mean? Illegitimate. What son is there who does not know the discipline of his father? If you are left without that discipline, in which how many have participated? All.

To be a son or a daughter of God, lay it down, is to be an object of God’s discipline. This is God’s treatment of all His children. That is to be treated as a son. You see that in verse 7, “It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons.” This is so certain that if it does not happen, verse 8 says “you are illegitimate children and not sons.” To be a son is to know God’s discipline. But I recognize this: You know, anytime that we start talking

and thinking about this God that we have come to recognize from Scripture; Sovereign Lord, they prayed in Acts 4. We have a Sovereign Lord. This is Almighty God. When Almighty God has you in His cross hairs, as a candidate in which He is going to inflict pain, that tends to cause us to rise up, take notice, and ask questions. There are always questions that pop up when we begin to talk about God's discipline upon His people. It does cause concern. It does cause questions.

So, what I thought I might do this morning is pose seven common questions regarding God's discipline, and try to make my best effort to give you a biblical answer from God's Word as to how to answer these questions. And the first question is this (and in our day and age, this is a question that we're posed with): "Isn't inflicting pain on someone else unloving?" Inflicting pain on somebody else — and by the way, I am assuming that discipline involves pain. I get that from verse 11. Look at verse 11, "For the moment all discipline seems - what's the word? - painful." That word (painful) in the original carries the idea of, I mean, it's a full gamut — pain, suffering, sorrow, grief, affliction. But in verse 11, "For the moment all discipline seems painful." We're talking about real pain. And look at verse 6, and I already said, "The Lord disciplines the one He loves and chastises..." This word (chastise) is, like I said, translated in other translations, scourging. It's the idea of scourge, whip, to beat, to be flogged with a lash or a whip. I mean, that's the terminology that's being used here.

God scourges, whips, flogs, beats every son whom He receives. And you say, "Oh, I like the sound of chastise better." Well, this was written in another language and if you look at what the word in the original means, that's why those other translations translate it 'scourge', and it sounds hard, because it hurts. It's real pain. There's a severity in God's discipline oftentimes. And the question is this: Isn't inflicting pain on someone else unloving? And of course, the answer is no. Not in the way described here in Hebrews 12. Of course, a slave master whipping the slave; of course, the mother who just, in anger, hits her child across the face with a frying pan, of course that's unloving. Jesus Christ, having those soldiers press those thorns through His brow, and tear His back open; of course, that was unloving. When He was scourged, that was.

I'm not saying that inflicting pain on another is always an expression of love. What I'm saying is that inflicting of pain upon another person definitely can be an expression of love, and is found here in Hebrews 12. The inflicting of pain is an expression of love because God says so. Hebrews 12:6, "The Lord disciplines — Who? Who does He discipline? — the one He loves." Right. The problem is this, that we live in a day when such an idea, the idea that you can have love and pain being inflicted, that idea is vehemently rejected. And all you have to do is look at the present spirit of this world with regards to spanking children. We can look at the prison system and how they handle remedial punishment (corrective punishment) in the whole legal system.

But just consider children. I recently had some guy send me an email, responding to a message that I did on Parenting, where I dealt with spanking. He told me that I better renounce my position, or he was going to go public and expose me. And all I sought to do was bring forth a biblical message on that. But that's the spirit of the world today. That's where they're at. But I mean, you tell me, you tell me. You got a little boy, he's running out in the street, against his parents instruction (don't run out in the street.) If dad takes that little boy and takes him in here and paddles him, is that an expression of hatred? I mean, doesn't Proverbs 13:24 say "Whoever spares the rod — does what? — hates his child." Why? Why is that an expression of hatred to not inflict pain? Because it is a momentary light pain that is meant to help the child in protecting them from what is much greater damage and

harm. It's love when it is expressed that way.

I find one of you fathers spanking your child after the service. I ask you why? You tell me, well your son keeps running out in the street after repeated warnings not to do so. Am I going to accuse that father of being unloving? Of course not. The pain he's inflicting on his son; hey is it pain? Yeah, it's real-life, rear-end stinging, I mean, it's pain. You ask the child, yeah it hurts. That wailing you hear come from the bathroom sometimes, that's not because they're tickling them with a feather. It hurts. But they're not doing it to harm the child, but to keep the child from real harm.

So, when somebody says, "Isn't inflicting pain on someone else unloving?" The answer is no. Not when the pain that's inflicted, remember what Scripture says, "Momentary light affliction produces an eternal weight of glory." Does that sound like hatred? No, that's not what that is. That's love.

Question two: "What does God use to discipline His children?" I mean, the question is this: What form of pain does our Father inflict upon His children when He disciplines us? I mean, an earthly father, I specifically had (my children know,) there's a specific paddle — a honey butter paddle that I got from grandma Conway's house when she died — and they grew up and recognized that was the instrument of correction. What is the instrument of our Father's discipline?

Now, we need to pay really close attention right here, because I want you to see something. Because this is going to help you not only identify the sort of things you can expect to encounter in your Christian life, which you are going to if you are a son, but this helps us determine what sort of God we have. You know, all this is coming to recognize our God, who He is, and trusting Him in the way that He is. And in affliction, it's really important that we have a good feel for what our God is like, and what His love looks like, so that we might trust Him in the midst of our sufferings and not kick against Him.

Now notice very carefully what is said in Hebrews 12:3. We didn't read these to start. We dealt with these in past sermons. But watch this, "Consider Him (Christ) who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." So, what's the issue? Hostile sinners. But notice this: "In your struggle against sin" — their struggle against sin was likewise. They were being persecuted, publicly persecuted. Their stuff was being plundered. Their struggle against sin is to not rebel against God when that's happening. That's the problem with these Hebrew people. They are in danger of falling away because things are getting so hard. And he says this: "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." Well, who is it that's going to shed their blood? Hostile sinners. The same people who shed Jesus' blood.

Now, isn't it interesting our author immediately says in verse 5, "And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord." What is directly the instrument to which the author is referring us to that is discipline of the Lord? These hostile sinners that they have been encountering. I mean, you don't need to glance back there, but if you were to look back at chapter 10 verse 32, what do you find? Public reproach, affliction, plundering their property. Our author immediately comes right at them and says this is God's discipline. God is using hostile sinners to discipline His people. Do you see that? No, I mean, do you really see what's happening? God is not passively sitting back, and says, "Ooop! Angels, gather round. Look what those hostile sinners are doing to My people. Look what the devil is doing to My people. Watch this. Watch Me turn this situation for good. Watch Me do Romans 8:28 here." That's not what is happening.

God is not passively sitting back and just observing. God is not reacting to what hostile sinners do to us. He is the One who is sending them against us. Read this for yourselves, Hebrews 12:6, Who disciplines? The Lord disciplines. Who chastens? The Lord scourges. Remember that term — whips. Who is scourging us? Who does the whipping? Who? Our heavenly Father. God is not a passive observer in your life and in my life when sinners and Satan beat us up, or when providence calls us to walk down the lonely path of pain. God is not just saying, “Well, okay, I’m going to respond to this and try to turn it for good. God designed it. God is the One who sends it specifically as a Father delivers the rod to His child. We need to see this. God Almighty, the Sovereign Lord, He rules over sinners. He rules over providence. He rules over demons. Now, they may unwittingly do what they do, and they’re responsible for what they do; but you be sure of it, that what they do is to fulfill God’s loving purposes of discipline in our lives. Make no mistake about it. God orchestrates our discipline.

So, are hostile sinners the only rod God uses? I don’t think so. It’s one of God’s rods, and it’s what He was using on these people to whom Hebrews was written. But if you look in verse 11, what’s really characteristic of discipline is pain. Remember that’s a broad word — sorrow, grief, affliction. These things are the sort of rods by which our Father disciplines us.

But then, here’s the third question: “How can I tell, as a Christian, if my suffering is actually discipline?” I think this is a very common question for us. My car breaks down. I actually had that happen this week. The first time my truck and my van broke down the same day. So is that God’s discipline? You know, those are the kinds of things we wonder. Something bad happens in the Christian life, something bad happens to them; a lot of times, there’s this sense to look and say, “Oh, what did they do?” I mean, remember Christ’s disciples? Here’s a man born blind, and what did the disciples immediately say? “Who sinned? Was it him or his parents that this man was born blind?”

You know, we think that way a lot of times. “Uh, something bad happened to them, they must have have been ungodly. They were getting worldly, they were entertaining something.” Now look, our understanding of discipline that way probably has to do with a very narrow understanding of this term ‘discipline.’ This word for discipline is like our English word for discipline. If I use that term with regards to: “Brother, you need to be disciplined in your life; you need to get up on time; you need to get to work on time.” You see, we tend to look at that term in a positive sense used that way. Whereas, if you say to the child who you caught in a lie, “Okay, you’re going to be disciplined,” we look at it very negative that way. In fact, I’ve even been talking about what rod God uses. That seems negative. But this term for discipline has got to do with the whole rearing of a child. It’s got to do with the guiding of a child toward maturity. The word encompasses training, instruction, discipline; it’s the whole training in education of the child.

And so, when we understand it in the broader sense, we don’t just limit it to, “Okay, something bad came in my life, what bad did I do that I got this from God?” A lot of times, that’s how we think. “Well, we sinned, this bad thing happened. We sin again, this bad thing happened.” But that’s not really the picture that you want to see. This discipline is not meant just to punish us. What’s it meant to do? It’s meant, you can see it in verse 10, it’s for our good. Do you see? “He disciplines us for our good.” It’s for producing holiness in us (verse 10). Verse 11, it’s for producing peace — the peaceable fruit. It’s for producing righteousness in us. It’s for the overall training, guidance, maturing, instruction of God’s children in holiness and righteousness. And let me ask you this: What hour of what

day do you not need these things? There's nothing at all in these verses that lead us to believe, I mean, if you read all the way down through here from verse 5 to 13 like we read, there's nothing here that leads us to believe that these folks this letter is being written to had done some grievous thing for which they are being punished by their Father. There's no indication there. They are simply being told, "You need to endure this, and it's for your good. You need to endure this, it's for your holiness, it's for your righteousness." This word 'discipline' is much broader than just this response to some sin in our lives.

Now look, God may very well, if you've got some long-standing idol in your life or some unrepentant sin, God may bring you discipline as a direct result of that. I'm not saying that that's not the case. But I have a feeling that this overall need that we have of righteousness and holiness, can bring God's discipline at any time; because this discipline, the word itself, does not just deal with responding to specific incidents. It's got to do with the overall training of God's children which you and I are in need of, every single day; every single hour; every single minute. And you know what? Even if you are just stuck on that idea that discipline has got to be in response to some sort of wrongdoing, well let me ask you that. What day have you not committed some wrongdoing? I mean, we are candidates for God's discipline, all the time.

Question four, "Since suffering is common to all men, how can I tell the difference between the Christian's discipline and the non-Christian's suffering?" This question really arises from verse 8, doesn't it? I mean, listen to verse 8, "If you are left without discipline, in which all (implied God's children) have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons." And so, that raises the question, "Wow! All men suffer, how can I tell if I'm not being disciplined by God?" I mean, if what God uses to discipline us is pain, and all men are exposed to pain, how is it even possible for me to look at somebody and say whether they do or whether they don't get the discipline of their Father. I mean, that's a valid question, right? That's one of the questions that comes up a lot of times. How can we tell? A believer gets sick; is it only believers that get sick where you work? Believer gets sick, unbeliever gets sick. Believer loses his job, unbeliever loses his job. What's the difference? Or is there any? I mean, Hebrews is written to Christians who had their possessions plundered. But just look through history. Thieves have plundered the stuff of unbelievers just as well. Wartime, unbelievers have been plundered just as well. And I'll tell you this, if you're a false professor in the church, and you are identifying with Christ, you pretty much are going to receive, oftentimes, the same kind of persecution that everybody else receives.

Look, our author is concerned that some of these people he's writing to may not turn out to be the real deal. He's warning them. If you go on sinning deliberately, there's God's wrath. He's concerned that there may be some in their midst that are drifting. You remember where we've come from in this letter. Well, you know what? They were getting their stuff plundered just as well. Why? Because they were identifying with Christ. How can you tell when one is disciplined of the Lord for His children, and whereas the other are being left without it and are illegitimate? Well, to answer this, we need to recognize what verses 9,10 and 11 are saying. Now watch this. Well, let's just read 9, "Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject — now that's key — 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." Now catch that. When God disciplines us, it's for the sake of producing 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." There's a yield.

Catch that word 'fruit' in verse 11. When God's people experience the loving pain, the loving sorrow, the loving suffering of their heavenly Father's discipline; what's the fruit? What's the fruit? It's righteousness.

Now, you just think with me about some place like the parable of the soils. What happens when you get somebody that receives the word gladly, and then pain comes—the sun comes out, persecution comes, hostile sinners? What happens? They wither. Did you catch that in verse 9? "Subject to the Father." Do you know what happens when the world suffers? Time and again, how does God fault the world at large when He brings calamity on the world? How does He fault them? That they do not turn to Him. Remember what we were talking about on Wednesday? Jesus saying, "Lean on Me. I have designed your suffering. I have designed your load to not be bearable, not proportionate to your strength." Why? So that we might lean on Him. What does the world do when difficulties come? You see them there in Revelation 16; they blaspheme the Lord. They swear, they curse, they kick. God's people are subject, and what happens? There's a fruit of righteousness. All it does is compound sin in the unbeliever. He kicks, he hates it, he complains, he argues, he finds fault with God, he puts God on the judgment seat. He brings accusation against God. And all it does is compound his sin. You look, watch people suffer, that's how you know. That's the difference. How they respond.

How about question 5: "Why me, why now?" And I know we've kind of dealt with this, perhaps, in others; but we often get so distraught when the Lord brings discipline. You know, if you're sitting here and life is pretty much going well, this message may just be going over your head. But when the pain comes, even though you can hear this message, listen, this truth is for you when you are actually suffering. Because when you are actually suffering, it can be very easy to forget these words; to forget these realities. When God brings discipline upon you that's unusually sharp and painful, we can be tempted like Peter. You know, Peter is being told, "You're going to suffer Peter." And he's like, "Well, what about that guy?" And that's a lot of times; all of a sudden, bang! we're suffering. It's like we look around, "What about all of them? Why are You singling me out Lord?" When the truth is He isn't singling you out.

I can remember reading the story one time about one Christian who came to another Christian and said, "You know, I've had questions about your salvation." And the guy said, "Why?" And he said, "Because I never see trial in your life." And the other man just burst into tears. And you know why he did that? Because he was suffering in a way that the first guy couldn't see. And a lot of times we suffer that. A lot of times we think, "Oh! we are suffering all alone." No. Through many tribulations, all of God's people enter that [kingdom]. Many tribulations. And sometimes, we can be very shortsighted. But we get to that place. We can say, "Lord, why, why me, why now, why is this coming?" I mean, that's often. Job was asking the same question. Remember Job, he's asking, "Why Lord, why?" And the thing is, we tend to be very aware of our own suffering. And you know why? Because we're the one that feels the pain.

I can't always look at you, and see, and recognize, "Ooh, something painful." You know, you lose a child, you lose your job, I can see. I can put myself in that place. But there's a lot of things we struggle with that other people don't see. There's things that happen in the family, there's things that happen in here, there's warfare that takes place in here, there's battles demonically other people don't see. There's ways we get wore out, there's ways we get discouraged other people don't see. There's tears that we weep that no one sees but the Lord, that a lot of times our spouses don't even see. There's battles we go through. And so, we can be very bad judges, actually, of other

people's suffering. When it's us, we feel it, we know it. We can be, quite often, insensitive and ignorant of the tough roads that others are being called to travel. And in our ignorance, oftentimes, when the sharp pain is inflicted on us, we can tend to ask these questions, "Lord, why me, why me? I mean, I don't see that other people are being called to walk this path you're calling me to walk. Why now?"

How do we answer? Well, I'll just answer this. "Why me?" Here's the answer: Because God loves you. "Why now?" Because God knows of no better time to make you more holy and more like Himself than right now. I mean, that's the best answer I can give you.

How about question 6, "What does the second half of verse 9 mean?" Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? Did you all notice 'live' in there? I find that little 'live or die' appended in various places throughout Scripture. We can tend to miss it. Do you recognize what's being said there? It's kinda like in Romans 8:13, "If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." There's oftentimes in Scripture it sounds very works-oriented. You know why? Because grace always produces these things, and if it doesn't, that's an indication of death. We heard in the first hour, Power! There is power! There are people that profess this form of godliness but they deny the power. Well, I'll tell you this, if you're truly saved, that power is going to reveal itself in how you suffer. You notice what is being said. I mean, you could flip this thing on its back. Be subject to the Father of spirits and live, or taking it from the negative direction, (you know, if you go back up to verse 5, "Don't lightly regard God's discipline,") Well, you could lightly regard God's discipline, rebel against the Father of spirits — and what? What's the last word? — and die. I mean, that's the opposite.

The path to life, it's interesting, a lot of times Scripture gives us this path to life. Like I think right off of Romans 6:22 where you have like this flow. You know, we're free from sin, we become slaves to God, we bear fruit, sanctification, the end, eternal life. By the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you live. Your mind set on the things of the flesh, you die. Here, you be subject to the Father of lights, you live. You lightly esteem the discipline of your Father and rebel against Him in His pain inflicting, and you die. And that's what we see. The world just rebelling against God's motions. God has said in Scripture, He strikes the unsaved that they might flee to Him; that they might turn to Him. That's the fault with people. "I struck them and they didn't turn to Me."

Being subject to God, that's connected to life here. But do you recognize what's being said? God may be sovereign over the pain He inflicts upon me, but what's my responsibility? It's to submit to it. That's my responsibility. And what does it mean to be subject? To be obedient. It means when God smites me, though it be ever so hard, I strive in the power of Christ to continue to walk in the path of obedience. And that's the temptation, right? The temptation is all the greater when the pain is all the greater, to not be subject to my Father. It's very easy to be a Christian when there's no pain, sorrow, suffering and trial. When do we get put to the test? The same way Jesus got put to the test. Right? I mean, doesn't it say in Hebrews 5 that although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. Every bit of suffering as it intensified and as it increased, Jesus is our example of this. I mean, watch Him. Consider the anguish of a Man who is sweating blood, and what words come from His mouth? "Your will, not Mine." That's what we're being called to here, to follow in our Master's steps when life is hard. To be subject to the Father of lights, that is the path of life. Jesus is our all-glorious example. You see Him learning obedience. Every time what He suffered increased, He obeyed and He submitted. I mean, He's there in that garden, and He's being put to it. I mean, the pain; what pain causes a man to sweat blood? What anguish of soul! And yet,

He surrendered to His Father's will. That's the picture we have here. This is the path of life: Continuing obedience; subject to the Father when we hurt.

Now here's the last question. This is one you have to answer, not me. Are you ready to accept this? Are you ready to accept the fact that you have a God, who for your own good, He may take your health, He may take your money, He may take your house, He may take your wife, He may take your husband, He may take your children, He may take your life, He may take your comfort, He may take your ease, He may require you to walk a bitter painful road. Are you ready to accept a God like that, who, for your own good, is going to bring pain into your life? Are you going to be subject to God when it comes? And it's coming. If you're a child, it's coming or it's already upon you. Or are you going to kick, and resist, and fight against this God and demand that He give an accounting of Himself. "I'm not going to be subject, I want an answer. Why? And I'm not content to have no answer."

Hebrews wants us to know our God as a disciplining Father. Recognizing and receiving this truth is extremely important for knowing your God, and for living by faith, and for trusting Him when all the foundations seem to be giving way. Are you ready to accept that your pain is not a result of God's hatred to you. Your pain, if you're a Christian, is a result of God's infinite love toward you. Do you believe this? Do you accept this? Do you believe, in your pain, that you're not being treated unfairly? Do you believe that you're not, when you suffer, being treated like a stepchild? You think of Cinderella. The mother is partial. Are you not going to fall for that? Because I'll tell you, when you suffer, you know who's right there at your side? The devil's there at your side, and he's going to tell you, "Look at your God. Look how He treats you. Allah doesn't treat his people so bad as that. Look what He's putting you through. You call that a loving Father?" Are you going to say, "No it is, because God's Word tells me." Are these passages we're looking at today sufficient for you when that hour comes, that you'll believe this? Or are you going to be more led to believe "He's treating me like an enemy or slave."

These truths are meant to give us that rock solid foundation that when suffering comes, you're not being treated as an enemy or a stepchild, you're being treated as one for whom God sent His Son to die. That's how you're being treated. One for whom the Father loves with a wonderful love; an incomprehensible love. The question is: Are you ready to accept this? Will you let the Word of God in these verses just settle down into your brain and settle the question for you? So that when the suffering comes, you don't turn on God, you don't make Him out to be a monster or a terrorist or unkind. When your suffering comes, much like with Job, God is not likely going to tell you why. You have to suffer right at that time. Why? It's your turn to suffer. And why you have to suffer as sharply, as deeply, and for as long as you're being made to suffer, Job never did get an answer even though God appeared to Him. When you don't get an answer, are you going to rest? Are you going to accept this? Because what this verse is telling us is what we need to know. And why? Usually He doesn't think we need to know.

When it happens, when it comes, are you going to be able to rest in the love of an all-wise Father to His child? Are you going to trust Him? And child of God, you need this. You'll need these words, because if not, you're not a legitimate child. You need this. You want to pay attention to this.