



The Hard Love of God

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Hebrews 12:4-11

Clint Pressley

⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 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.

⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

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? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ 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? ¹⁰ 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. 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.

(Pastor prays)

Do you feel loved by God? Or forgotten? Do you feel like things are going well in life? Do you feel like life is harder than it should be? And what does being a Christian have to do with it? What is God doing in your life right now? There is a difference between God's judgment on sinners and His discipline of His children. Sometimes, it doesn't feel like it, but there is. And what does the Christian Gospel have to do with any of this? How are you right now interpreting the events of your life? I mean mostly the hard things. Let's get clarity upfront on what the Christian Gospel tells us and use that framework to

unlock this passage. One scenario is outside of Christ. There are people who grew up in the church but never really gave their life to Christ. They went off to college and fell away from the church. They would consider themselves good people but are just not in a church. So, they are going through a really hard time now and it's just about to break them.

That's one scenario. The other scenario is in Christ. In this scenario, a person is brought up in the church and God opened their eyes and they received the Gospel, and they became a Christian, but they are now going through what may be the most difficult time in their life. One is outside of the grace of God and is receiving judgment and the other is a child of God and is being disciplined.

What does that mean? As Christians we will often suffer the painful consequences of sin. But we will never experience God's judgment for our sin. That judgment was placed on Christ at the cross. If that's the case, what then is God doing with the pain and disappointment and trouble you are having right now? I think this passage speaks to that with clarity and strength and encouragement. My hope is that when you walk out of here today, you will view what you're dealing with differently. I hope that you will see the hardship differently and be reminded that God loves His children. And if you are in Christ, that means that everything He's doing in your life is done with a loving, developing purpose, conforming you into the image of Christ.

We Trust God's Love When Things Get Hard

There are several things in the passage we need to reflect on to help us trust God's love. The first thing to reflect on is in verse 4.

Our worst battles are internal

Let's just read the verse with some explanation.⁴ *In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.* The pastor is reminding the people that it could be worse in comparison to Chapter 11. The biggest problem you have is your own sin. It's a struggle in our society today.

We can just list a few things in our culture that we reject. There is same-sex marriage and gender confusion. There are drag queens leading story hour to your children at the library. There is transsexualism ideology and groups supporting pro-abortion. There are people asking you to use preferred pronouns and just a general godlessness of the sexualization of society. All of the above and more are eating away at an ordered society. But don't get so caught up in the culture war that you forget your own soul. The apostle Paul said in Romans 7:18-20, ¹⁸ *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.* ¹⁹ *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.* ²⁰ *Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.* And in Romans 7:24-25, ²⁴ *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* ²⁵ *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* The first fight we have is not with the culture but with ourselves and the sin we haven't conquered in the name of Jesus. What we need is the holiness, humility, godliness, and patience of Jesus. We need the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control. We need the spiritual disciplines; gathering to worship, praying, Bible intake, accountability, fellowship and self-denial. Sometimes the most heroic Christian thing you can do is gather with the saints on Sunday and spend time with God on Monday. Instead of always looking outward for some dragon to slay, let's begin inside your chest. Our worst battles are internal. The second reflection is...

Our best weapon is God's word

Let's look at verses 5 and 6 and read it with some explanation and then make some application. 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.*

⁶ *For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives."*

Rejoice in the Bible. It gives encouragement and is life giving. It reawakens you. Exhortation is *Paraklesis*. It means comfort or encouragement. Ask God to give you a heart to love the Bible and rejoice in the Bible.

There is something else in verse 5. Don't ignore the warnings in life. "*My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.*" You are a child of God; he disciplines your life. Don't ignore it.

A young man gets saved at church. Grows up and goes to High School. He walks with the Lord. He goes off to college and he is influenced by guys who are friends with him, but they like to party and drink. So, he goes with them from time to time and it becomes a little bit of a habit. He's torn because he is a believer, and he wants to honor God, but he is succumbing to the pressure to go party with his friends. One night he goes to the degree that he has too much to drink, and he gets in his car and drives drunk. On the way home, he runs into a tree totaling his car. Miraculously he survives, nobody is hurt. But he gets a ticket and pays a fine and avoids jail time. Everybody knows what he went through and now he has a decision. That's a warning from God. What do I do with that discipline? My son, don't regard lightly the discipline of the Lord.

You've been caught looking at pornography, but she has agreed to stay. It's a warning. And the warning is that discipline is hard. It sometimes hurts. It can be embarrassing. But it is a gift that God uses to guide His children. Now there's another part of this discipline. *Don't be weary when reproved by him.* Don't ignore warnings. Don't implode. Don't be so overcome with guilt that you stay down. Don't forget that Christianity is hope. What is the Gospel? That Jesus Christ paid the penalty for all our sins. The judgment fell on Him. That at the cross there is mercy and forgiveness and restoration. There is joy. Don't let the discipline of God drive you into the ground. That is not what it is designed to do. Don't implode. How do you do that? I think verse 6 tells us. *⁶For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."*

Remember, God loves you. The Lord disciplines the one He loves and today, I am His favorite!

Our heavenly Father knows what He is doing

God disciplining us should not surprise us. It's the indication that God is dealing with us as His children. Furthermore, it's a reminder that there is still plenty that needs to be done in us. What sins are you fighting? Are you frustrated or selfish, do you have road rage or self-pity? God knows what He is doing in you! That discipline is hard. But there are a few things to remember.

God treasures His children. We see that in verse 7. *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 battling a hardship right now, a person or a job, God is treating you as His child. He is knocking off the hard edges and smoothing down the rough spots and getting you spiritually in shape. He's training you in righteousness, and if you haven't felt the chastisement of the Lord, you might ask, am I a child of God?

Here is a good place for the Gospel.

God is holy and we are sinners. God loves us so He gives us Jesus. Jesus lived perfectly and died on the cross in our place. God raised Him from the dead. And the way you appropriate that, the way you become a child of God is to turn from sin and turn to Christ. Then you are adopted and have assurance. Verse 7 tells us that God treasures us. God treasures His children.

You know I get a bad email from time to time. If you get bad emails from someone, you just need to imagine what they would say if they really knew you. Those would be worse.

God corrects His children. Let's read the second part of verse 7 with verse 9. *For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?* ⁹ *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? A good father disciplines out of love, not anger or bullying and not because he enjoys it. Discipline is absolutely gut-wrenching for a good parent. It's why so few do it anymore. You know the saying; it's going to hurt me more than it hurts you. The children don't believe that but when they become adults, they see that it is true!

A good father equips his children. Let's read verse 8. *⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.* Discipline teaches you how to do things. It's basic life skills. It's how to wash your car or cut the grass or change a tire. It's how to work hard and provide a living. Think of the discipline of your earthly father and all the lessons including how important it is to have a good name and standing. All of this discipline and hardship and struggle is going somewhere. God knows what he is doing. Let me give you one more thing to reflect on.

Our future is forged by His love

Verses 9 through 11 gives us a fourfold purpose of why God is doing all these things in my life, in your life. Let's read this passage and then come back and apply it. *⁹ 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? ¹⁰ 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. 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.*

A submitted life to God's Lordship is best. He is our good father and disciplines for our good. Our earthly fathers, they make sure we don't touch a hot stove, or they take bad things away. Our heavenly Father teaches us to trust and rely on Christ. God disciplines us so that we may share His holiness. It's not legalism, you relying on your own ability. In the end we will receive the peaceful fruit of righteousness. That is peace centered on Christ and nothing

to do with your own ability or circumstances. It is the righteousness of Christ, and that righteousness is what makes us acceptable to God as adopted as His children and loved as His sons and daughters. It makes it so that we can trust God's love when things get hard. Our worst battles are internal, keep fighting. Our best weapon is God's Word. Our heavenly father knows what He's doing, and our future is forged by His love. Rejoice in our loving Father, ask for His help and embrace the Gospel.

(Pastor prays)