

The Pursuit of Holiness (Part 4)

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[0:00] Well, take your Bibles.

Let's open them to Hebrews chapter 12. And let me just go ahead and read the text just right off! and then kind of give you a little bit of an introduction, and kind of bring us back up to speed where we are in this chapter in Hebrews chapter 12.

I'm going to start reading, I don't know, I think your notes may have said verse 4. Really, it's verse 5. 5 through 11. So let me go ahead and read that. We're not going to get that far tonight, but I want to take that block of the text, at least read that whole block, because that all goes together.

Here's what Hebrews says, And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons. My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him.

For whom the Lord loves, He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons. For what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

[1:16] But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect.

Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

Now, no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful. Nevertheless, afterward, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Alright, now, our subject in Hebrews chapter 12 is the pursuit of holiness. That's the theme that runs throughout this chapter.

And Paul's teachings on this subject, the subject of holiness, his teachings are masterfully illustrated. And Paul was good at that.

[2:21] And by the way, some of you might be wondering, did Paul write Hebrews? And I believe he did. So let's just put that to rest, okay? I'm going to say Paul wrote, so let's not go back to that again.

Paul used some vivid illustrations. And first, and this is what we've already looked at, in verses 1-4, I think maybe your notes say 3, it should be 4.

1-4, he uses the figure of the race. Do you remember? I know it's been several weeks, but that was kind of the imagery that he used in the first few verses of the chapter.

The figure of the race. But now, here in verses 5-11, he moves to the figure of the family. The family.

I think we could categorize it that way. But in both illustrations, the key principle is discipline. Let's not forget that, lose sight of that.

[3:23] In both illustrations, whether we're talking about the runner who's preparing to run his race, or we're talking about the family, and using that as an illustration, in both cases, the key is discipline.

So in the first illustration, then it would be the discipline of an athlete. In the second illustration, the one that we are going to be focusing on tonight and for several Wednesdays, it is the discipline of a father.

So let's kind of keep that in our minds. It's the discipline of a father. Now, the illustration is not, of course, in reference to an earthly father.

But our earthly fathers are a point of reference for us to understand the concept. But the father of which Paul is referring is, of course, God the Father.

Alright? So that kind of introduces, kind of gets us set here. Let me ask you a question. Have you ever asked God why?

[4:35] Have you ever asked God the why question? No, no, I'm looking around here. You folks are very spiritual people. You know, you would never.

You know, never, right? Alright, so let me just do this. If you've ever asked God the why question, raise your hand. Alright, is it unanimous? I think it probably is.

Do you ever feel guilty about that? And I want to have you raise your hands for that. I think most of us, all of us, if we'd be honest, we have kind of built into us this thought, especially if we've been church-ed all our lives, that maybe there's something inherently sinful about asking God why.

You know, things happen, stuff happens, and you might kind of entertain a question that might be framed this way. God, if you are all-powerful and sovereign and you love me, then why am I suffering?

Or why do I hurt? Or why did you not answer my prayer? Why are you allowing certain things to happen in my life?

[5:52] And so we might frame the question in many different ways. It depends on what's going on. But it all comes down to why, God? Are these things happening in my life?

I was thinking about Karen Kretzer a while ago. I mean, that woman, bless her heart. You know, she's had, what, eight surgeries on her neck and back. Now she falls and breaks her wrist. Now, I haven't called Karen because I didn't know about her, but I bet she's asked God why.

Don't you think? And so we have those kind of questions. So, you know, we've all asked God the why question. Let me ask you another question, similar question. Have you ever asked God, hey, where question?

You say, what do you mean by that? This goes even a little deeper in saying, where are you, God? You know, if we don't feel a little tinge of guilt or sinfulness by asking God the why questions, then we really will feel that when we ask God in those times when we ask God, where are you?

You know, where are you, God? I mean, where is the God who says He loves me? He's getting real quiet in here.

[7:08] Now, we're not always in this kind of thinking or questioning. I mean, it just kind of crops up when we're under the press or when things are happening that are not easy and not good and that are hard.

And we ask God, you know, where are you? I mean, where is the God who's supposed to supply all my needs? And where is the God who's supposed to answer all my prayers and give me fulfillment and joy and all those kind of things?

Now, I'm just kind of setting us up here for this idea of discipline because we need to understand that.

And I think the answer to these questions, or maybe I should say the things that happen that prompt us to ask those questions, the answer really comes down to this whole idea, this whole reality of sanctification.

Or, as I've put it, this process of holiness going on in our lives. And of which, that process we participate in.

[8:23] That's why I call it a pursuit of holiness. Paul summed it all up in verse 10. This entire chapter when he said that we might be partakers of His holiness.

And so he's going to speak to us about the discipline of God in our lives and he's going to cap that off with this statement that we might be partakers of His holiness. That answers the questions. The why questions, the where questions. And it's not always easy to come up with the answer in the midst of the questioning.

But God will bring us through it and then we'll understand, as Paul understood, that we might be partakers of His holiness. That answers the questions. And why the things happen in our lives and why God allows them.

Even though He loves us. Even though He's sovereign. Even though He's all powerful. And nothing too hard for God. We like to hang on to those promises. All things work together for good to those who love the Lord and call according to His purpose.

[9:23] We like to hold on to those promises and yet God still allows some tough things to happen. And it's all wrapped up in this idea of discipline. Of discipline.

And right off, even when I use the word discipline, you're thinking discipline in a negative sense. But as we're going to see, there's nothing negative about it.

Now, so, we're going to learn then, tonight I hope, and the next couple of Wednesdays, where it's that God's goal for us is holiness.

That's His goal. God's method is discipline. Discipline, that is in the broadest sense of what that word means related to God's activity in our lives.

So God's goal for us is holiness. His method is discipline. Now, I'm going to go ahead. And I thought I might just give you very quickly, since I didn't print it, I'm not going to do it.

[10:31] I was going to give you the whole outline. I'll just give it to you a piece at a time. You've got part of it. What we're going to be looking at tonight is the design of God's discipline. What is God up to here with this discipline?

What is it that He is accomplishing? His objective, the design of His discipline. And there are four things that we're going to see here. And we all need to understand God's discipline of His children. And the first thing is the design of discipline. The design of it. First thing I think we need to understand, or I need to make clear, because I understand the connotation that is attached to the word discipline.

The first thing we need to understand is this word discipline. In relation to God's work in our lives. Because some of us, maybe most of us, to some degree or another, have misunderstood discipline. We only think of it in one sense. If you have a King James Version, I just read from the New King James Version, and you may have noticed and heard that the word there is chastening.

[11:48] That's kind of an old King's English word. We don't use it very much. But the word is chastening. And I'm afraid to admit that in our minds, the word carries a very narrow meaning.

But in reality, the word chastening, or at least that's the English translation of the word used in the Greek text, in reality it's a very broad word.

Very broad. And it basically means to train. That's what it means, to train. But even that needs to be explained some.

The word in the Greek text is *paideia*. Now you're not going to remember that. It comes from the word *paideion*. It means child. And so the word *paideia* means, it refers and encompasses the whole training and education of a child.

Now see, it means a whole lot more than we think, doesn't it? And it's pretty difficult to bring that into the English without adding a lot of words to try to explain.

[13:05] But the idea is not just simply spanking us, discipline in that sense, or chastening us in that sense. It encompasses the whole wide range of things that we would do for our children.

And we'd train them. It's the whole idea, training and educating them to correct them, to cultivate their lives, to educate them, to punish them.

Yeah, it involves that too, but it's the whole thing. And the goal, of course, being, all this is wrapped up in this word, the goal being to develop and educate and mature the child.

That's what this word *paideia* means here. And that's what Paul's getting at in reference to God's activity in our lives. We lump it under the one word, either chastening, but I prefer the word discipline.

We lump it all under that, but it's the whole thing. And so the Bible's telling us here in these passages that we're going to be looking at for several weeks, is that God the Father, this is His business, God the Father is in the business of developing and maturing and educating His children by whatever means He sees fit.

[14:26] That's all wrapped up in this idea of discipline. Now, the bad thing is we have a narrow view of what that word discipline means.

So, what's wrong with using the word chastisement? Or even discipline? What's wrong with that? Well, the problem is because of what the word has come to mean to us.

The word chastisement, let's just take the word that's in this particular translation, the word chastisement to most of us means punishment. It doesn't. Which has come to mean something very negative.

And, at least our way of thinking, something wrong. Well, but our conclusion about the word chastisement or discipline, that kind of conclusion is wrong.

And, you know, it kind of identifies something that I think is very sad. And that is that we as born-again Christians sometimes have kind of a legalistic...

[15:38] Maybe that's not the right way to put it. We have a view of God the Father that somehow God the Father is the Old Testament God.

You ever thought in those terms? Now, I'm not talking about Jesus. You can't separate God the Father from God the Son. There are two separate persons. I mean, the personages. Identifiable persons.

But when we think of God the Father, or even if I were to use the word Jehovah God, Yahweh God, we think of the Old Testament. And so we've kind of, in our minds, a lot of people have separated the personalities.

There's the Old Testament God. And there's the New Testament God. Now, God the Father, that's the Old Testament God. And He's an angry God. And a vengeful God.

And a wrathful God. And God the Father is the God of judgment. Judgment only. He's the one that commanded the Israelites to go out there and kill every man, woman, and child, and all the animals too.

[16:42] And out there in those heathen nations and such. And that's kind of our view. Well, I say ours, not mine. I don't really think it's yours either. But to some degree, we can find ourselves kind of slipping into that thought or that idea that that's God the Father.

You know, He's the one, you know, God the Father is the one that punishes His children when they step out of line. And so He's up there watching. And all He has to do is just take one step out of the way and He's ready to zap you.

You know, that kind of thing. I mean, I'm exaggerating the point. But, but this is kind of the problem. And so in our minds or in many people's minds, believers, Jesus is the New Testament God and He's humble and meek and benevolent and kind and compassionate and gracious and merciful. And then God the Father, He's the Old Testament God and He's stern and He's judgmental. But we could not be more wrong about that. And the first step in our understanding of the discipline of God is to change our thinking about this, about this particular area.

Now, I need to remind you and you should be able to notice it from your copies of God's Word that what Paul writes here in this passage is not a New Testament idea.

[18:07] It's not some new kind of new age of grace type of idea. This thing of... This is the Old Testament.

In fact, what we have there in the text is a quote from the Old Testament. It's Proverbs, by the way. Proverbs 3, verses 11 and 12. And it says, My son do not despise the chastening of the Lord nor detest his correction for whom the Lord loves.

He corrects just as a father of the son in whom he delights. So, there's not some new concept. Some new point of revelation that is New Testament as opposed to Old Testament.

This is a quote from the Old Testament. So, God's discipline is not because He is stern and harsh or judgmental, but rather because He loves and delights in His children.

So, we need to change our thinking about God the Father and God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are one. And, there's no differences between them in their character and nature.

[19:20] And, the Bible says that God and all of His persons is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So, we don't need to make a separation there. and, that does, when we do, it does affect our understanding of God's design for discipline.

So, don't get the idea that God is judging you that this thing that happened in your life or this point of suffering or hardship or whatever it is, maybe some of you are even going through right now, if you're a born again believer or one of God's children, don't get the idea that God is punishing you or judging you for your sin.

He's not doing that and we certainly understand that, don't we? I mean, there's a huge difference between God's judgmental or judicial punishment for sin.

Huge difference between punishment as a judge and discipline as a father. Big difference between those two things. We need to keep the right perspective about that.

And, I think we need to be reminded about that. You know, let's just remember this point of theology. That Christians will suffer consequences for their sins.

[20:39] I mean, we do suffer consequences for sins. We do. But Christians will never, never experience God's judgment for their sins. Do you know that?

Do you believe that? You'd better. Do you? You're not going to experience God's judgment for sin because that judgment was taken by Jesus on the cross.

And, listen, God does not exact double punishment for sin. For any sin. If He did, He would be an unjust God, wouldn't He?

Now, we certainly deserve God's wrath and punishment. Don't misunderstand. understand. We still deserve it. We're just not going to get it by His grace.

And, born again believers will never face it because God or Jesus took it for us. And quite frankly, there are some believers, I think, who need to be liberated by that truth.

[21:42] Need to be liberated by it. That God's love and God's justice would never, listen, never allow Him to require payment for what Jesus paid in full at the cross.

He's already paid it, it's paid. And God is not going to require payment from you. And so, if you put that aside, this is not judgment for sin, then God's discipline is something else.

He's not disciplining you because He's judging you. He's disciplining you and me as a loving Father.

And, you know, when you trusted Jesus Christ, everything changed from that point on. Your life from that point on, Paul said even here in verse 7, he said, God dealeth with you as what?

Sons. And daughters. Because they're daughters. in here. Alright, so, don't ever forget that. Let's get to it. The design of discipline.

[22:52] I better get to it. Number one is to correct us. And this is the one that we normally think of.

And it's certainly a part. God corrects us. His discipline involves His correction. He does it to correct us. You see, though God's discipline is not, as I've already explained and you know, God's discipline is not judgment for sin.

God does punish His children as a loving response to their sin. Punishment then is corrective.

Not judgmental. And you and I understand that kind of discipline, don't we? We should. We all have fathers and mothers.

And, you know, none of our fathers and mothers were perfect, but they did discipline us to some degree or another. We understand that, don't we?

[24:02] Our fathers and mothers disciplined us to do what? To correct our behavior. Hopefully. Sherry and I believe in that. We believe in discipline, disciplining our children.

We may discipline them in a different way than some. We believe in spanking. I'm sorry. We do.

Now, all of our kids, Jonathan, not yet, but he's getting close.

A little difficult to spank them anymore. But there are other ways. But we believe in discipline and, you know, the results, I hope, will be obvious from discipline.

And, this kind of discipline, that is to correct us, says, this is what you're saying to your child. Your behavior is wrong.

Your action and even your attitude. I believe we should discipline attitudes as well. Your actions, your attitudes are unacceptable. And I love you so much that I can't let you do that.

[25:08] I love you so much that I don't want you to ever do that again. And that's, what am I doing? I'm correcting. A lot of parents, today, who need to discipline their children.

They're not doing their kids any favor by not disciplining them. They're not doing themselves any favor either. They're not doing their teachers at school any favor either.

Or their society. A lot of parents are raising rebels. Future rebels and criminals. Because, they refuse to, for whatever reason, refuse to discipline their children.

And we do it to correct them. And, our Heavenly Father is the supreme example. And I think I listed there a passage in Psalm. Psalm 89 verse 30.

Let me go ahead and just read it to you. Look at it later. And he's speaking of David's descendants. If his sons forsake my law and do not walk in my judgments, this is God speaking, then if they break my statutes and do not keep my commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod.

[26:15] I've said that to my kids a number of times. When you do this, I will punish your transgression with the rod. And this is what God is saying to the descendants of David, his sons.

And their iniquity, I'm going to punish them with stripes. I mean, it's pretty severe stuff. So, it's pretty clear, isn't it? I mean, God, the Father, He's the supreme example of how we ought to as fathers.

But the idea here in the text is not that we understand how we ought to behave as fathers. It is that we understand that God does correct us as a part of His discipline.

But I don't want to go away from that text because the next verse says, Nevertheless, by loving kindness I will not utterly take away from Him nor allow my faithfulness to fail.

By covenant I will not break nor alter the word that has gone out of my lips. Once I have sworn by my holiness I will not lie to David. His seed shall endure forever.

[27 : 15] See, you have both those things together here, side by side. See, God's discipline is not God's rejection, is it? And as a father I'm not rejecting my children when I discipline them.

When I discipline them I don't kick them out of the family. Do I? It even crosses my mind.

Sometimes I'd like to get out of the house for a while. But, you know, not really.

Just kidding. Maybe make them sleep out in the garage or, you know, like that. I never kick them out of my family. They are always my sons.

And, so my discipline is not rejection. God's discipline as He corrects us is not His rejection. And, shame on us for equating the two sometimes.

That God is rejecting us. And likewise, when I sin against God my father, just like I am with my children, God the Father, He corrects me and disciplines me and does not reject me.

[28 : 21] Does not cast me out. But rather, He does so to draw me deeper into fellowship with Him. And, that's the wonderful thing about it. God said in Psalm 89, I will punish your transgression with the rod.

I will do it. You can count on it. But, I will not break off my loving kindness with you. And, by the way, the loving kindness, the word loving kindness is the Hebrew word for grace, covenant grace, kessed, beautiful love.

He's not kicking you out of the covenant. That is, He's not kicking you out of your salvation. Alright, second, not only to correct us, but secondly, to protect us.

Now, we move away from correction, that part we get. We understand that about discipline. If we understand anything about it, we understand that. But, there's more to it.

Secondly, He does it to protect us. And, this is beautiful and wonderful. God allows certain things to happen not because we have sinned, but rather to keep us from sin.

[29 : 35] Have you ever thought about that? And, that's very true of our parents, our correction of our children. We are wanting to save them from the grief and the tragedy of sin and temptation and not just that, but even harms their lives.

So, we discipline them to protect them. And, so God's discipline is preventative or preventive, I think is what I put in there, the same meaning.

Preventive, not punitive. Right? God's discipline sometimes becomes a preventative measure against temptation. Now, when God disciplines us to correct us, the reason is usually quite obvious, isn't it?

I mean, we, we, we, we, we usually know it because we've sinned. And, we need to deal with that, repent of the sin.

When I was a kid, my dad spanked me and he did spank me. I may not have agreed with him and I certainly didn't like it, but I knew why. I'd messed up.

[30 : 49] But, when God uses discipline to protect us, we don't always know why. God may never show us why. We may never, we may never see why.

But, but, but he does see it. You know, when I was a teenager, I never did understand why my mom and dad were so mean to me. Do you ever feel that way?

You know, they wouldn't let me go to dances. Wouldn't let me go to certain parties. Wouldn't let me stay, spend the night with certain friends. And, you know, and if I was out, I had to be back by a certain time.

And I just, you know, I didn't know why. Why were they so mean to me? You know, see, they knew some things I didn't know. And, now I find myself wishing they'd been meaner than they were to me. I think we can all relate to that. But, but the same is more true, infinitely more true with our Heavenly Father. Some temptations and trials He allows us to experience.

[31 : 51] He does. But some He protects us from. because He knows what we can handle. And, He knows things that we don't know. I think Paul's a good example of that in 2 Corinthians 12.

I'm not going to read the text, but you are familiar with the story where Paul was talking about his thorn in the flesh. And, that God allowed him to have that thorn in the flesh to buffet him, to keep him humble.

humble. And, why did he need to be kept humble? He struggled with pride. Why would he struggle with pride? Well, the man wrote most of the New Testament. Now, I think Paul knew at that time he had received more revelation than anyone else.

Any of the other apostles. And, that certainly could be a point of pride, don't you think? And, God gave him some messenger of Satan. We don't really know what it was.

but it kept him humble. And, he kept asking God to take it away and God wouldn't take it away. He said, my grace is sufficient for you. God does that in our lives.

[32 : 57] God didn't send him a thorn in the flesh because he had sinned. He sent it to protect him. And, for a specific reason. And, you know, I wonder how amazed we would be if we could somehow see some of, you know, some of, that some of the illnesses we've endured or inconveniences or flat tires out on the highway at night in the rain with good clothes on.

You know, why do things like that happen? You know, financial things or career failures or whatever they may be. If we could just see that these things were not designed because God was punishing us for our sin, but God was rather protecting us from sin or some point of harm.

and some of the detours and dead ends in life are put there by a loving God as a preventative nation. And, we've got a little further to go but we've got to quit.

I'll just end with this. A good example would be God's people Israel after God delivered them out of Egypt. And, back there in, I think I have it here, yeah.

back there in Exodus 13. This is very interesting. He delivered them, they're out of Egypt, they don't know yet that Egypt, the armies are pursuing them.

[34 : 24] And notice, I want you to listen to what the Bible says, then it came to pass when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near, that was the direct route.

For God said, lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt. So God led the people around by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea and the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt.

What's all that at that? I tell you, when you're on foot, the best route is the direct route. Do you think? And this mean old God led His people the long way.

And why? Because they had sinned? Well, they were about to, but it wasn't because they had sinned at this point. Because He wanted to protect them. If He led them the direct route, they would have to deal with the Philistines.

They weren't ready to do that. Sometimes we want God to lead us the direct route, but He leads us the long way around to something. Because He knows we would encounter things that we're not ready to encounter.

[35 : 43] And God then disciplines us not to correct us, but to protect us. And by the way, I like the King James.

King James translates, it says here that they went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt. King James translates that, harnessed. that they went up harnessed.

Harnessed out of the land of Egypt. And that is, the word there is the word described of a harness for a horse. A wild stallion that needs to be reined.

And God led His people. He harnessed them and led them in the way they needed to go to protect them because God loved them.

And God does that for us as well. Thank you.