

1. Why might it be helpful to think of the death of David's child as God's discipline rather than God's judgment?
2. Why is David able to go into the house of God and worship in spite of losing his son at the hand of God?
3. How can God show favor on their marriage (and children) given such a horrendous start for David and Bathsheba's relationship?
4. Why does God not take his steadfast love from David, and remove the kingdom from his control, in the way he did to Saul after his sin in 1 Samuel 13:13–14?

Discipline is Hard

Now, I don't want you to think I am downplaying how hard this story is. I do think the main point of this story is restoration. Considered as a whole, and certainly this is where we will end, is that the Lord does not remove his steadfast love from David. This is what makes David so much different from Saul.

But I don't want to run to the end so fast that we miss the fact that discipline is hard. Yes, it is an act of love and mercy, but I think it is okay to say that sometimes, there is such a thing as a "severe mercy."¹ The discipline of God poured out on David is light and momentary compared to the judgment that Saul received. But we would be lying to ourselves if we said this was felt light and momentary to David in the moment.

There is a song, a hymn really, that I want to read to you. And this is a long one, but I want to read the whole thing. I think it captures the spirit of our passage this morning. God's loving discipline is poured out on David in order to make him grow. It is a mercy, but in many ways, it is a severe mercy.

The hymn is titled, "I Asked the Lord that I Might Grow." It was written by John Newton, the same man who wrote Amazing Grace. From what I can tell, he wrote both of these songs the same year, 1779. The song says,

I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace;
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek, more earnestly, His face.

'Twas He who taught me thus to pray,
And He, I trust, has answered prayer!
But it has been in such a way,
As almost drove me to despair.

¹ Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy*, Harper Collins, 1977.

I hoped that in some favored hour,
At once He'd answer my request;
And by His love's constraining pow'r,
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart;
And let the angry pow'rs of hell
Assault my soul in every part.

Yea more, with His own hand He seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe;
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

Lord, why is this, I trembling cried,
Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?
"Tis in this way, the Lord replied,
I answer prayer for grace and faith.

These inward trials I employ,
From self, and pride, to set thee free;
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou may'st find thy all in Me."

John Newton wrote that to describe how the Lord used his suffering as discipline in his life. I think it also captures what God is doing for David in this section.

And I share that with you to point out that the discipline of God is different than the judgment of God. That doesn't mean that the discipline of God is easy. Sometimes the discipline of God can be quite hard. But it is driven by love and it is always purposed to bring out repentance and growth, and to free us from self, and pride so that we might find our all in him.