

Hebrews 12:3-13

“The Dividends Of Divine Discipline”

Disciplined to go the distance, has been the discussion at hand here in these 1st couple of Vs of Heb Ch 12, completing our course, running w/endurance the race that is set before us. Don't throw in the towel on this “Christianity” thing. Don't fall out in fatigue. Don't cry out how you can't go on. But rather let's shed some excess baggage that we might continue on, let's lighten our load, & lay aside every weight, & the sin which so easily ensnares us that we might complete the course that's set before us.

The author here likening the Christian experience to a race, a cross country type of a race, & if you're to go the distance, if I'm to finish my course, there's going to be a demand for personal discipline in my life. A buffeting of my body, a denying of my self, a crucifying of the flesh, there is no way you can enter a cross country race having never given thought to what will suit me equipment-wise, having never worked out or sought to stretch myself endurance-wise, taken note of my diet or things of that nature & expect to go the distance, it's not going to happen. Yet so many commit to Christ, but they don't count the cost, (oh salvation is free, but discipleship, learning to lead a life of holiness, purposing to finish well will cost you) it's tough leading a life that's set apart to Christ, it can be trying at times, it takes discipline. & Discipline visits our lives on 2 levels. We spoke of the 1st level last week, personal discipline, if you want to lead a life of personal holiness, it's going to take personal discipline, we talked about laying aside things in our lives that are both ambiguous, & obvious, the “weight” & the sin. **Now the weight in & of itself might not be sin, but it may be slowing you down, holding you back, keeping you from performing at your peak, you've got to get rid of it, cut it loose, let it go. & W/regard to sin, well, that's obvious isn't it. If you're flirting w/sin, or flat out entertaining it, don't think you'll be able to go the distance, don't fool yourself into thinking you'll do ok, or that you'll finish well, repent of it, cast it aside, set your eyes on Jesus.**

Now, I want to mention a couple of things here that I didn't hit, or highlight last week but I think they're worth mentioning. The 1st would be the personal responsibility & accountability that we have regarding our choice to sin, let's just read Vs 1.

Vs1

Now as you read through that Vs the words “we” or “us” are either mentioned or implied no less than 6 times. In that single Vs, but there's not so much as 1 mention of the enemy, satanic opposition, or demonic oppression. **& I say that simply to say this; it's way too common in the Christian arena for the believer to blame the devil for the sin they've ensnared themselves in. Don't be giving the devil credit for the sin you got yourself into, do you understand that there's not a single place in the word of God that gives us a reason to blame the devil, or demonic forces for our sin...** “The devil made me do it” is unjustifiable according to God's word, the devil didn't *make* you do anything, did he tempt you? I'm sure he did (though sometimes he doesn't even need to do that, our flesh is quite competent, quite capable of contemplating & entertaining sin w/out anyone else's help or encouragement. **But I'll give you that, he absolutely may've tempted you, placed that bait in front of you, but he didn't make you do anything, you made that choice all on your own. If it were the accountability or the responsibility of the devil in your sinful situation wouldn't this have been an ideal place for the Holy Spirit to address it?**

“Therefore since we’re surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rebuke the devil, & take authority over the demonic regarding every weight, & the sin that so easily ensnares us...” But he doesn’t say that, nowhere does it say that, but rather the responsibility is laid upon us to lay those things aside, lead repentant lives, we have no excuse for our involvement in sin, it’s incumbent upon us to lay those things aside.

Vs2

Here’s something else I’d like to highlight quickly (couple things). 1st of all we’re not told anywhere that we’re to *enjoy* our suffering, our trials, or our tribulation, but we are called to *endure*, we’re to learn to look beyond it, remember we don’t focus on the problem at hand, but the payoff at the end. Jesus didn’t enjoy the suffering, didn’t delight in the shame, as a matter of fact He *despised* it. Yet He endured in obedience to the Father, looking beyond it to the hope & the joy that lie before Him.

Now, here’s what I want you to see. Because it’s something that many believers struggle with, or stumble over (that is they’re offended by it). But listen things don’t always go as we think they should go, & what do you do when something takes place that you didn’t think you were signing up for when you committed your life to Christ? Remember J.B. struggled w/that, “Uh Lord here I am in jail, are you the One or not?” & Jesus told John’s disciples to tell him all that they’d seen, the lame walking, the sick healed, the blind seeing, the dead raised, & “Blessed is he who is not *offended* because of Me.” Blessed is the one who doesn’t stumble over the fact that things didn’t turn out like you thought they would or perhaps they should when Jesus is your leader. God’s ways are not our ways.

& I say that to say this, we spoke last week of the shame associated w/the cross. & Of course Jesus said, “*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*” Matt 16:24 But a lot of believers are “offended” on this point they’re willing to do just about anything, or endure anything for Jesus except shame, or embarrassment, humiliation, something that attacks their dignity. “Lord I’ll give you my time, you can have my money, you can use my skills, you can have my undivided attention, just don’t ever ask me to be *embarrassed* for Your sake, or undignified in the eyes of my culture, or to bear shame. But if that’s your position let me gently remind you that you can’t be called to follow Christ w/out being called upon at sometime & in some way to bear shame for His sake, learn to look beyond it. I’m not telling you to enjoy it, but look unto Jesus, the author & finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him *endured* the cross (in all it’s shame) *despising* the shame nonetheless, but looked to the reward; & has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. & What did Jesus say? “*To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*” Rev 3:21

Vs3-4

They were suffering socially, they were suffering economically, but they weren’t suffering physical brutality (not yet) striving against sin. & So the encouragement comes to them, & it comes to *us* in our days of difficulty, when we feel “beat down,” weary & ready to throw in the towel. “Hey while you’re down there wallowing in the mire of self pity because of how bad you have it, consider Jesus; that ought to boost your spirit. That ought to help place things in their proper perspective.” & Really that’s the heart of this whole epistle, “Consider Jesus” in all His depth, in every dimension, in every aspect He’s the more excellent way, look to Him, trust *in* Him, on every level.

& When it comes to difficulty, those turbulent times, times of crisis & calamity, let Christ encourage you there as well. Think on His suffering, what *He* endured, & bear in mind that Jesus *never* used His Divine attributes to serve His personal needs. He didn't endure because He used some sorta Divine power to see Him through, He bore the full brunt of His brutality as a Man. & He didn't do it for His benefit, but for yours, & for mine, so don't you give up, don't you give in, & don't you lose heart. Jesus has begun a work in you, & He's going to finish it, don't you bail out. Consider Him, He's both the *exemplar* & the *enabler*.

& Of course the idea here is that no matter how hard we have it, if we'll consider Jesus & all that He endured we'll realize that suffering, & hardship is no reason to give *up* or to shut *down*.

So; personal discipline is a reality in the life of *any* believer who's to be formed & fashioned to go the distance, to run to win, & to finish well.

There's another type of discipline that comes into our lives as well, & that's *Divine* discipline, but not so much as a coach training his team, but rather from the perspective of a loving Father raising His kids, bringing them to maturity.

Because w/all this talk about hardship & difficulty it raises a natural question; why? Why do hardships, why do difficulties factor into our lives at all as Christians, & the answer may shock you, it may surprise you.

Now as we prepare to launch headlong into this particular passage, I feel it necessary to lay a little bit of ground work before we do. Because context is key, the author here is seeking to encourage those who are *discouraged* as to what can help them carry on, & why it's necessary for them to undergo hardship at all. We're not exempt from hardship simply because we belong to God, Jesus is his case in point. Jesus said, "*Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.*" John 15:20 He told us that in this world we were going to experience tribulation, Paul said that *all* who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus would suffer persecution. It's just a fact of the Christian life, but why? Let me tell you there are a # of reasons why, Heb Ch 12 is just focusing in on one of them.

1st of all I would say that not every suffering, not every tragic happening has a particularly spiritual meaning behind it. Jesus demonstrated that in Luke 13 when He spoke of a certain tower in Siloam that fell & killed 18 people. & He said that they weren't worse sinners than anyone else, it wasn't a judgment from God, sometimes accidents happen.

I would also say that it's important in the midst of our trials, or our suffering to remember that God is not the author of evil. God is not tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone (James 1:13). Now certainly God *allows* evil, & He allows people to *choose* evil, & often times the ramifications of other people's choices spill over into our lives. However God will take those things in the life of the believer & even if we can't see it in the here & now He will ultimately use them for our eternal good, & His eternal glory. Rom 8:28, it's either true or it's not, "*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*" It doesn't say that we're going to understand everything or glean God's heart in each situation, but it makes us a promise that we believe by faith nonetheless.

Ok, what are some other reasons for suffering, or hardship in the life of the child of God. 1 Obvious reason would be sin right? Reaping what we sow, Peter said, "*For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently?*" 1 Peter 2:20 The point being that when you sin, it's going to reap a ramification, & you, or myself will just have to endure it; there's no getting around it.

However the antithesis of that is true as well, sometimes we'll suffer because we make a stand for righteousness.

Jesus said, “*Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*” Matt 5:11-12

Sometimes God will bring duress into our lives for “motivational” purposes. Consider the 1st church in Jerusalem, Jesus had told them to take the gospel into all the earth. They hadn’t left Jerusalem, however when persecution came, they dispersed. If we’re not where we need to be God has a way of motivating us through hardship.

Sometimes our suffering serves a “correctional” purpose. Consider Jonah, he didn’t want to walk in God’s will, he headed the opposite direction on purpose. But God didn’t give up on him, He pursued him, brought him to the point of being willing to walk God’s way & serve God’s will for his life. He received God’s correction. **That’s really the children of Israel’s story in the wilderness over & over again. They would murmur & complain, God would send some plague, or some serpents among the camp, afflict them in some way, they would cry out & repent, come back to God, decide to get right w/God & so their suffering would cease.** The Psalmist said it like this, “*Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.*” Ps 119:67 Eventually we learn (most of us the hard way) that it’s just not worth it to kick against the goads, & go against the grain of God’s word.

Of course sometimes our suffering serves a purpose that perhaps we’ll know nothing about, that would be Job. God had a purpose in his suffering that went well beyond the scope of this world. & God never told Job, “Why?” Job never got an answer for that.

So there’s no “pat” answer, no easy explanation for why we suffer, there’s multiple & manifold reasons why crisis & calamity may enter our lives. Sometimes God may be preparing us for a future purpose, that we might comfort other w/that which we’ve been comforted. The reason that’s before us in Heb Ch 12 is “Divine Discipline.” God molding us & maturing us, helping us to decrease that Christ might *increase* in our lives. 2 Things the author points out regarding tough times in order that we might be encouraged to carry on. #1 Consider Jesus, #2 God’s showing you, you’re His.

Vs5-6

How does God show you you’re His? Through a windfall of cash, the best of the best & ez living all of your days? No, through chastening, through discipline, through scourging (the idea there being the spiritual spanking). Probably not the proof you were looking for huh?

Now just like there’s more than one reason we may encounter affliction, there’s more than 1 way God let’s you know you belong to Him. 1 Is by witness of His Spirit, Rom 8:16, “*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,*” another way God affirms to us that we’re His is that we love the body of Christ. **It’s not natural to have a love for godly people, it’s supernatural. If you’re not a believer Christians are a source of contention, they kinda get on your nerves, or at the least you have a tendency to avoid them. But if the Holy Spirit is living in you & has transformed you, then you love the people of God.** 1 John 3:14, “*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.*” John also tells us that obedience to the word of God bears witness to the fact that we’re in Christ.

But the bible also tells us (he’s quoting here from Prov 3:11) that God divinely disciplines His sons, His children. & If you can sin, or just go on through life never having God’s heavy hand of chastening on your life, then you have cause for concern because though others may get away w/things, if you belong to God you won’t; not ultimately. **Everyone else was getting away w/fudging on their time card, you got busted, everyone else was taking long lunches, you got busted.**

& It's because they aren't God's kids, you are. How many times did you hear growing up & have you utilized now in your own home, "So & so didn't get in trouble..." & The response, "So & so isn't my kid, you are." God deals with, & disciplines His children, don't forget the exhortation that speaks to you as sons.

Vs7-8

You see there it is, if you've never experienced the chastening hand of God upon your life, there's definite cause for concern, because that shows that you're not really His child. When I hear a ruckus going on & something not right happening in mix of children & my attention is drawn toward it, my eyes are only looking for one thing, my child, my children. I don't worry about chastening someone else's child, I'm concerned for my own. That's the way God is. God loves us too much to give us over to our own way, how many times have you heard from your child how you must not love them because you don't give in to them, or give them over to their own way. But it's because you love them that you don't. Jesus said in Revelation 3:19, "*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*" & Again Proverbs 13:24 "*He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.*" God doesn't deal w/us eventually, but promptly, & that's how we're to discipline our children, promptly.

Now as long as we're on the subject of God's discipline I should also point out that God never disciplines in such a way as to "punish" us, that is make us pay for our wrong. God doesn't discipline in anger, His dealings w/us are never from a sense of justice, His justice, His wrath was satisfied at the cross, Jesus paid for your sin, you'll never have to in Him. God's dealings w/us are motivated by His love, by His faithfulness to you & me. As the Psalmist said, "*I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right, And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.*" Psalms 119:75 Sometimes being in the midst of God's discipline we can get the feeling God doesn't love us anymore (we're like our children), in reality it's God's love that compels Him to chasten us, to discipline us promptly. His discipline isn't a sign of condemnation, but rather confirmation, it bears witness that you belong to Him.

Vs9-10

Now we're starting to see the dividends of divine discipline. God doesn't just randomly afflict you for no reason, there's a purpose, He has a plan, He wants you to profit from it, to partake of His holiness. & The author here says, "Hey, you've had a human dad, & when he disciplined you, you may not've liked it, but you respected it, & he had faults, did things that seemed best to him but he wasn't perfect. Now if you'll respect his discipline *how much more* should we be in ready subjection to the Father of spirits & live?"

& Whether the idea here is that of living the life He's purposed for us, or perhaps subjecting ourselves to Him so that we can live as opposed to die, I'm not sure. The bible says that there is a sin leading to death. & If as a believe we choose to lead our lives in rebellion to our heavenly Father, there may come a time when He'll just take us home rather than let us lead a life that leads to our destruction. It's not common, but it happens, & even that is a move of God's mercy & grace, looking out for our eternal best interest. (Again you see that happen time & time again w/the children of Israel in the wilderness wanderings, we're not exempt). **Either way the point remains the same, we do well to receive the authority, the chastening & the discipline of our Heavenly Father. Because Father knows best, He disciplines us for our profit. That we might be partakers of His holiness.**

Vs11

W/all this talk of divine discipline make no mistake there's no allusion to the fact that we're supposed to enjoy it. There's no chastening that seems pleasant while you're in the midst of it, as a matter of fact it's painful, it's a drag, there's just nothing fun about it. But we're to set our eyes on the end result, because when we surface on the other side of it, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who've been trained by it.

You know throughout my Christian experience over the last 17 + yrs I've met Christians who seem to lead their lives from one crisis, one calamity to the next. I mean it's just problem after problem after problem. & At some point you just have to wonder, are they blind to God's discipline in their lives, are they just not learning the lesson that God is seeking to teach them & so they're brought to this place time & time again. Probably not in every case, but certainly there are people like that, because there are different ways that people might respond to God's discipline, did you see that as we made our way through this passage?

Some people *despise* God's discipline (Vs 5). He says don't despise God's discipline, don't just blow it off, take it lightly, become a fatalist & simply subscribe to the, "Welcome to life" frame of mind. Sure we all have trouble, but is God seeking to teach you something, do you have ears to hear, or do you despise His discipline, just take the "whatever" frame of heart & mind.

Other people are *discouraged* by God's discipline (Vs 5 as well), the word means to *dissolve* or *despond*, you just faint, give up under the hand of God's discipline in your life. The bible says, "If you faint in the day of adversity, Your strength is small." Prov 24:10 This is the guy, the gal who feels like they've done all this for God now how is it that He's letting this happen to me? It's almost the cry baby Christian.

But we want to be behind curtain # 3, here in Vs 11, we don't want to despise God's chastening, nor be discouraged by His discipline, but rather we want to be *trained* (that is exercised) by it. We want to learn *from* it, become stronger *through* it, & yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness having been trained *by* it. You see is your life yielding the peaceable fruit of righteousness, or is it one continual crisis after another. Listen, I'm not saying that if you're going through tough times that God is chastening you, it's not always that simple (we developed that earlier). But be open to what God may be seeking to show you, & how He may be desiring to grow you through it. Because there are dividends to divine discipline, it's for your profit, my profit, that we might partake of His holiness, yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Vs12-13

If you've surrendered to discouragement, this is a picture of you, hands hanging down in exhaustion, weak in the knees, unable to press forward. The Holy Spirit is saying here, "Hey, knock that off, lay aside the weight, crucify the sin in your life, consider Jesus, & don't forget the exhortation that speaks to you as sons. God loves you, He's dealing w/you, He desires to see holiness & righteousness coursing through you, don't fall out, press forward, don't be *discouraged* be *encouraged*, that you might reap the benefits of Divine discipline & go the distance in J.C.

Prayer Points:

God I pray for my brothers & sisters today, Lord for this fellowship as a whole, that you might strengthen any hands that are hanging down, any feeble knees that are no longer pressing forward, Lord that rather than total atrophy that healing might begin even now. **God that you might encourage Your body through Your word & that we might lead lives of holiness, that yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. God may we not grow weary while doing good, or be defeated through crisis or calamity, help us to consider Jesus, & so be strengthened in the inner man.**

Listen if you don't know J.C. you've never given your heart to Christ, God wants to do a fresh & new work in you as well. God wants to work holiness & righteousness into your life, not because of what you do, but by simply receiving what He's done for you on the cross. If you're ready to repent of your sin, God's ready to forgive you of your sin & give you everlasting life in Christ. **All sin, all have fallen short of the glory of God, but God desires to forgive you, to wash you & cleanse you, but you have to come to Christ. Are you willing to do that today, just open your heart, cry out to God, surrender to Christ & you'll never be the same.**