

Title: For our Good
Text: Hebrews 12.7-11
Theme: The discipline of the Father
Series: Hebrews #49
Prop Stmtnt We have to endure the discipline of God in order to share in holiness.

Last Sunday I contrasted the two different ways in which we view discipline by using two chairs. The one represented the person who thinks that discipline is done “to him” with the result being self-pity and the other who realizes that the discipline is being done “for him” with the result being consent, trust, growth and joy. I received an e-mail a day later from a guy in our congregation whose father was a pastor. This guy (whose initials are Roger Stone) said that as a boy, he would be messing around in church, particularly during the sermon, when his dad would grab a chair and set it right next to the pulpit, facing the congregation and make him come and sit in it for the balance of the service. He confessed that last Sunday’s illustration caused some serious flashbacks but after a few therapy sessions he was fine!

Read Text:

This text is pretty straightforward and does not have many subtle nuances or surprises. It is not difficult to determine the plain meaning of this text. Our challenge, in our culture is being able to actually appreciate the meaning and take it to heart. When it comes to parenting, our culture is so child-centered, that you can no longer assume that people even understand the basics of parental discipline the way that the author of Hebrews assumed that his audience would.

Parenting is really odd these days. Parents freak out over ordinary germs and try to protect their kids from them, which in turn does not let them develop a good immunization system and at the same time, neglect the things that kids really need protection from. Your child is not a flourishing protégé who only needs affirmation and direction. Your child is a sinner who is falling and is going to crash unless you get in the way and catch him. His way, his path is a self-centered path of destruction and you need love that child so much that you are willing to get in their way.

So, before we work through this text, we need to identify and affirm the assumptions about parenting that the AH brings with him as he writes this, so that we can rightly understand his point. So, here is the pre-sermon. It has six points.

1. *God has ordained that a man and a woman be **married** before they engage in behavior that can produce children.*

God established the family as the greenhouse for raising children because...

2. *Fathers are **responsible** and therefore, actively engaged in the discipline process of their children.*

Parenting that intentionally leaves out dads, is going to be problematic. The role of the dad is so very, very, very important in helping a child understand his or her identity. In our society dads are either gone, or they are absent affectionately, relationally, and the kids do not know who they are or what their role is. The prominence of gangs is an attempt to have a semblance of a family for those who do not have one. In order to be in the gang, kids will do incredible things (even murder) in order to be accepted and find a place to belong. The drive and need to have a place and people is so strong that kids will go to obvious extremes in order to try to have that.

3. *If you do not discipline your children you are treating them as if they are **illegitimate**.*

If a father does not discipline his sons (children) he is telling them, he is sending them a message that they are illegitimate children. The pattern that God has established is for fathers to love their children. Fathers who love their children discipline their children. If a father does not discipline his children he is saying, you are not my child because my failure to discipline you means that I do not love you and the only reason why I would not love you as my own is because you are not my own. A father's failure (sin) to discipline results in anger in the child.

4. *Discipline is **holistic**.*

What I mean by that is that discipline is not limited to punishment, nor limited to behavior. Punishment just focuses upon consequences for wrong behavior. Now, that is part of it, but there is more. Discipline is related to the word discipleship. Parental discipline is really the discipling of our children to become what God wants them to be. That means that our mission as parents is to get beyond the behavior to the heart. We have to confront wrong behavior and seek to correct it in a manner that lets them know that this is a very important issue. But, our children do wrong things and fail to do right things because of a heart of foolishness and unbelief. Christian parenting is the day in and day out process by which we help our children confront wrong behavior, practice right behavior as a means to expose wrong belief so that we can teach them the gospel (right belief).

Now some have this utopian view that if you encourage right behavior so much that your child will naturally see the benefit of this and you will not have to confront wrong behavior. What planet do you live on? Your child is like you. Your child is a sinner who will naturally see how easy it is to manipulate people in order to get what they want out of life, because they have a heart that says, "I deserve to be God!"

5. *Discipline is to be done for the good of the **children**.*

I have observed people who want to be parents because they want to be loved, want to be needed, want to be "fulfilled", etc. They love the attention that is lavished on

them when they are expecting, or when their child is a baby. What have they done? They have made a good thing into an idol. Parenting is not about you and your needs and comfort and identity. If you think that it is, then your discipline (or lack thereof) will reflect that sinful goal. Discipline is not primarily so that your kids do not drive you crazy and embarrass you in public or perform well at school. Discipline is utilizing the tools that God has provided in order to raise your children for their good, which is for his glory.

6. *Bad examples or bad experiences are no excuses for **disobedience**.*

All of these are good points, but they are not the main point of this text. They help us understand the main point, but this text is not primarily about how you parent, but it is about how your Father (in heaven) parents you.

God is your Father:

1. **Whose discipline trains you to endure.** (7a)

This chapter begins with the command to “run with endurance” (v.1). That word shows up again in v.2, 3 and here in v.7. But the idea is all over this text. We are warned against the dangers of spiritual fatigue, bitterness, and giving up moral vigilance. The result of this will be weariness and faintheartedness (v.3). God knows the demands that are placed upon you. He knows the pressure that you are facing and that you will face. So, God is training you to endure. Verse 7 says, “*It is for discipline that you have to endure.*” In other words, discipline is the goal of endurance. I’ve said it before that endurance is the result of preaching to yourself instead of listening to yourself. Now, here is where it feeds itself. Not only does endurance teach you discipline, but God wants you to learn discipline so that you will endure.

Right now, we live with the wind in our face. As a general rule, when we are young we have energy, but we don’t have time. We are busy in school, busy at work, and busy raising a family. We look forward to the day when we can rest for a bit, take it easy and not be under the gun all of the time. But, when we get older, we now have the time but we don’t have the strength. When you are young, you have to press on, because when you are old you have to press on too. There is never a time when you have complete control over everything. Life, as it is right now, will always be in your face. The point is, discipline in the little areas will add up to a life of discipline that will produce endurance and faithfulness. So, do not get frustrated with the daily challenges. God is in those challenges and is preparing you for more. Endure!

2. **Who treats you like a Son by disciplining you.** (7b-8)

Can you sin and get away with it? Some of you get frustrated when you sin and your conscience bothers you. You look at others and think, “how can they do what they

do and it not bother them?!" Hey! Be grateful that you cannot sin and get away with it, because...

a. A true son (child) of God will be disciplined by God. (7)

The last phrase (7), "*For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?*" is a rhetorical question. The author of Hebrews is not asking for a list of kids in your class at school who are angry, rude, snobbish, spoiled, immature brats. He is asking this question with a sense of astonishment like he is saying, "Can you imagine someone who is actually a son whom his father does not discipline?" It is beyond his ability to conceive of such a thing. Now, in this rhetorical question, we can see that there are two components: 1) the character of the son and 2) the character of the dad. Both of those have to be examined when we are discussing the way we parent. The only reason why a dad would not discipline his son (children) is because he does not care. Sadly, we know many, many guys, who do not care about the children that they have fathered. It is so difficult on a child to come to the realization that my dad does not care if I live or die. My dad, does not care if I have the approval of God. Beloved, some of you have had wonderful earthly fathers. Some of you haven't. But, the big idea of this text is all about the character of the children because the character of our Heavenly Father is never in question.

b. God does not discipline illegitimate sons. (8)

Can you see how helpful this would have been to the readers? What happens when we encounter pressure and trials? We tend to think that God is against us, punishing us, rejecting us, singling us out, etc. Trials and suffering does not mean that God has rejected you, it is the opposite. Trials and troubles are the means that God uses to mature you. What does maturity look like? Simply put, maturity is the process of going from being a fool, to being a wise person. God brings pressure to bear in order to squeeze the foolishness out of us. (hence the appeal to Proverbs [5b-6])

You have heard me point out some of the absurdity of "your best life now" theology. Here's part of the reason why. If you got your best life now, if you get all of your comfort now and do not go through discipline and hardship, it would be because you are not a believer.

3. Who is better than the best dad. (9)

You can see how the author of Hebrews goes to great lengths to really drive home the point that God disciplines us for our good. Each statement is another layer of this argument. But verse 9 is like a really BIG layer. This is one of those "how much more" arguments. Discipline from an earthly father develops respect on the part of the child. Your child was not born with respect, but with disrespect. The calling of a dad is to teach your child to respect others and ultimately to respect God. Discipline helps to do that and when a dad does that the child learns to respect his father. Well, if that is the case with earthly fathers, how much more is this the case with God?

But, notice how he refers to God. He calls him the “Father of spirits.” That phrase is taken from Numbers 16.22 and 27.16, where God is described as the “God of the spirits of all flesh.” He is the Sovereign King of the universe whose in the position of authority over every single human being. He alone is God. All mankind answers to him and in him alone is life. In order to live you must submit to the discipline of the God who is over every single person. This little phrase is loaded! God’s position as God demands that you submit to him. God’s possession of life dictates that if you want life you have to submit to him.

I love Bill Cosby’s talk about parenting when he relates what his dad used to say to him. “Son, I brought you into this world and I can take you out.” Now, I recognize some of the legal complications that are inherent within that statement. So, while it is legally problematic, it is theologically right on!

The Bible presents two ultimate fathers. 1) The devil - John 8.44 (father of lies) or 2) God (father of spirits) who is life. Satan will tell you what you want to hear and make promises that appeal to you. But, since he is a liar, he will not make good on his promises and the end of his road is destruction. God, on the other hand is the best dad ever. His goal for your life is life, also known as the way of wisdom. But since you are born into this world with an orientation toward sin, God gets in your face. God loves you enough to confront you.

A child views love as: If you love me, you will let me do whatever I want to do (fool). What that child does not know is that if he is allowed to do whatever he wants to do, he will destroy his life. If he has a dad who loves him enough to get in his face, then, he will respect his dad for it. So, if earthly fathers, who do not do this perfectly, are deserving of respect for their disciplining, how much more is God worthy of respect?

By the way, note that in verses 9-10, the writer sticks himself into this process. He goes from saying “you” to saying “we.” He knows! All of God’s true children go through this.

4. Who disciplines you so that you will share his *holiness*? (10)

It is a great delight to watch children grow and develop. There comes a time when they join the adult world and become another voice that speaks to your heart. There is hardly anything more satisfying than to have a child who becomes a trusted confidant.

Now the parallels are not exact, but the pattern is the same. God made us for his pleasure and enjoyment. But he cannot enjoy us when we are in rebellion against him. But that is what we are. So, God provided a means for us to be delivered from the penalty of our sin by sending Christ to be our King-Savior, our Redeemer, and our Sacrifice. When you surrender the rights of your life to him by trusting in Christ alone because he died for you, then you are born into the family of God, and you

become his Son (male and female). At that point, God becomes your Father and now is in the process of helping you become enjoyable. He is disciplining you so that “we may share in his holiness.” The author of Hebrews recognizes that parents do not always get it right. Their disciplining “seemed best to them”. As parents we wish that we could go back and do some things over. But God’s discipline is perfect and is for our good. Accept it. Submit to it. Profit from it. Don’t fight it.

5. Whose momentary discipline produces *permanent* results. (11)

Have you ever heard someone say, “Oh, this was the week from ___?” For the believer, that is not true – is it? We can understand the sentiment. “*For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant.*” The writer acknowledges that discipline can really hurt. The trials can be times of great sorrow, and while compared to eternity they are “for the moment”, we, who live in the moment, experience them in the moment, and the moment seems like a very long time.

The pattern is repeated: Painful discipline now = peaceful righteousness later (provided you have been trained by it). In other words, Don’t waste the trial! There are two word pictures used in this verse. The one is agricultural and the second is athletic. If you submit yourself to the rigors of the training, in the end there will be sweet fruit.

Conclusion:

The pattern throughout this entire section is very clear. Submitting to the discipline of God, albeit painful will produce joy. There is a law of life that God has put into place that reminds us of this. Every mother knows it. The discomfort of pregnancy intensifies to the pain of childbirth which results in the pleasure of a new life, only to discover that this nine month process is only the beginning of an eighteen (or more) year process. Discipline now produces pleasure later on.

Do you remember Psalm 126.5-6? “*Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.*”

When your spirit is sad, and your heart is breaking, do you feel like going out and planting seed? Do you feel like sticking with the task? No! You feel like staying in bed, pulling down the shade and not answering the doorbell or the phone. So, what are you going to do? Are you going to listen to yourself, or are you going to say, “Ok tears, you can pour, you can drip, you can run, but you cannot rule. I’ve got things that have to get done. I have a race that I have to run today. I have seed that has to be sown. What is going to happen at the harvest time? You are going to be so glad that you planted that seed – aren’t you?”

There is one other thing that I want you to see. Discipline is not easy for the parent either. It is not just the weight that we bear of having to confront behavior and belief

that is wrong and destructive, we also bear the weight of reality that our children can be rebels. Kids can be stubborn and at one level it may seem sort of cute, but when your three-year old, that you have birthed, bathed, fed, loved, clothed, prayed for, sung to, sacrificed for, taken to the doctor, gotten up in the middle of the night for, looks at you one day after you tell him that it is time to go to bed and says, "I hate you", could anything hurt worse? Yes, what could hurt worse, is for you to ignore the reality that your child needs to be rescued from himself. You expose yourself to rejection when you discipline. But, the fruit of a child who grows to be responsible and relational and enjoyable and delightful is ecstatic. And that, is exactly what God is bringing about in you.