

## **“Loving Discipline”**

Liturgical Date: Proper 16 C

Primary Text: Hebrews 12:4-29

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the 11th Sunday after Pentecost, is the Epistle Lesson from Hebrews, the 12th chapter. The title of today’s sermon is “Loving Discipline”. OUR FATHER GOD DISCIPLINES HIS CHILDREN SO THAT WE MAY GROW AS FAITHFUL AND HOLY DISCIPLES.

A young plumber is being groomed to take over a business when the owner retires. However, after a series of errors that resulted in some unhappy customers, the owner sits him down and tells him he must work for another year and show improvement before he retires and hands over the reigns of the business.

A student is very intelligent, but she often is lazy in her work ethic in the class. The teacher assigns her after school detention until she can learn to turn her homework in on time.

A young army private falls asleep on guard duty. His sergeant revokes his weekend pass privileges for 3 months as a corrective measure. Perhaps now he can be well rested enough to stay awake on duty.

Finally, a daughter disobeys her parents by not only missing curfew, but is discovered to have been in a dangerous part of town when she was out late. Her parents ground her from going out with her friends for the next few weeks to emphasize the importance of being obedient to them and to keep their daughter safe.

Now I believe that we can all see the wisdom in these measures of discipline that were applied. The business owner has a reputation as a good plumber to protect, the teacher wants her students to know you must put in the work and not just rely on IQ levels, the army sergeant knows that in a war zone falling asleep on guard duty could end up with people dying, and the parents want to raise a responsible child and keep her safe. Now those being disciplined probably didn't like the discipline. Maybe they knew they deserved it, or maybe they thought it was "unfair" but hopefully would later realize it was for their own good. And we can all relate to being disciplined in some way. I would wager that just about all us have fallen short on the job at some time, had a teacher take us to task, and we definitely remember "getting in trouble" as a child. And as we mature we can see that if the discipline was applied with the right motivation, then it was definitely helpful to our formation as more mature people.

So as you have probably surmised by now, today's sermon is about discipline. Most of us understand the basic concept of discipline in our lives and world. But, what about discipline as it relates to God? Does God discipline us? Well, some people don't like to think about that. Usually arising from a feeling of self-righteousness by running through a list of good things they have done they don't think God should discipline them. But does that make sense? No, it doesn't and the writer of Hebrews explains just why God disciplines us.

Proverbs 3:11-12 says, "*My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of his correction: For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth*" and this is echoed in verses 5-6 of Hebrews 12. Of course God would discipline us, because He is our loving Father. And just as in the illustrations above,

discipline-when it is done rightly-is done out of a motivation of concern or love. It is done to teach, to correct, to strengthen us. Verses 6-7, *“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son who he receives. 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?”* Yes, sometime we have to “endure” discipline. Few people like being chastised. In fact, if the consequences of a disciplinary action were pleasant, then it would fail in being actual discipline. When verse 11 says, *“For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant”* we can all probably give a hearty “Amen” to that! But what about the second part of that verse, *“but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it”*? That is little harder. That takes a little more time. If you are like me, you can remember things your parents did to discipline you that you thought were dumb, unreasonable, and mean. But then later, maybe even 10, 15, or 20 years later, you realized that they were right. This type of thinking usually kicks in when you have kids of your own!

You see we must realize that being disciplined by God is proof that He loves us and we are in fact His children. Take a look at verse 8, as it is an interesting one, *“If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.”* The King James uses an even stronger word here, “bastard”. We can become concerned when we feel like something happening is God disciplining us, “What is God trying to show me?” we may ask. But the truth is that we should be much *more* concerned if there is no evidence of God disciplining us! There are cases when a parent feels they have done everything they can do and just cuts ties with a wayward child. When you read Hebrews you see that there are people who God reaches that point with. They were once in

the faith, but continue to rebel. I don't have to tell you that is a serious thing. So the point is that if God is disciplining you, you are His child; one needs to be very concerned when they are just allowed to revel in their sin and no discipline is coming. The text is teaching us that if we would expect a loving earthly father to continue to try to discipline a child, then why would we not expect God to do the same? If you want to be a child of God rather than a bastard you need to realize that there will be discipline. **OUR FATHER GOD DISCIPLINES HIS CHILDREN SO THAT WE MAY GROW AS FAITHFUL AND HOLY DISCIPLES.**

We do want to be clear what discipline is and what it is not. Discipline is not punishment simply for punishment's sake. There are people who just enjoy making other people's lives miserable. There are bad parents who abuse their children or demand strict obedience because they desire only power, control, or their children not doing anything that would cause them inconvenience. But that is not God. He is a good and loving Father who wants the best for His children. There is always a positive goal with the discipline that God applies. And even the best earthly parents will make mistakes in disciplining as they do, as verse 10 says, what seems best. But with God there are no mistakes in our discipline.

And think about it this way. Followers of Jesus are called what? (hint we know especially about 12 of them) Disciples. Disciple and discipline come from the same Latin root word *discipulus* meaning "learner". We learn through discipline. True discipleship has the goal of teaching something and shows care and concern for the one being disciplined. And as long as we are on this earth, we will continue to sin. Even as redeemed and forgiven children of God, we still have a sin nature-what is known as the "Old Adam." The Formula of Concord in the Lutheran Confessions states in

Article VI, *“Because of these fleshly lusts, God’s truly believing elect, and regenerate children need the daily instruction and admonition, warning, and threatening of the Law in this life. But they will also need frequent chastisements. So they will be roused, the old man driven out of them, and they will follow God’s Spirit.”*

All of this begs a question if you are facing a challenge, or challenges, in your life right now. The question is: Is what I am enduring right now from God or the devil? I wish I could give you an absolute answer to every specific situation, but I cannot. This is because God may send a particular situation to challenge and grow you. But the devil may also send something to discourage you and attempt to lead you away from trust in and obedience to God. Sometimes the answer to “is this from God or Satan?” is unknowable. Ultimately, whether a challenge is from God or the devil we must trust in God no matter what.

But I can tell you some things for sure. First of all, if the goal of whatever the trial or trouble that is coming to you is for good, it is from God. If the goal is bad, then it is from the devil. God does not chastise and challenge without a purpose-often times we don’t know that purpose-but it is there. I have preached on this before, but we must know that God does not tempt us to sin. When we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, *“lead us not into temptation”* we are not asking God to not tempt us to sin but to deliver us from temptation. James 1:13, *“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted by evil, neither tempteth he any man.”* The bottom line is this: Satan tempts, God tests. God is obviously in control of everything so He will allow certain things to happen, but the actual temptation to disobey Him-to not trust Him in faith-comes from our sinful flesh and the devil. For example, in Hebrews it talks about Esau

selling his birthright for a meal, specifically a bowl of stew (v15). God put Esau in the situation where he could have went one way or another, but the temptation to do the wrong thing did not itself come from God. In our own context, God may bring an illness or financial trouble into your life to discipline you-which by that is to teach us something. But if we get angry and curse God for the illness or rob a bank to get money-that is not His fault. And finally, discerning whether something is from God or the devil often becomes clearer with time. We may look back later and see that God was disciplining us, testing us, and the good that came out of it. Or we could look back and say that looks like it was the devil trying to discourage us. A relationship that you battled to save with someone you cared deeply about may have ended, but then years later you see that God worked the situation for good in bringing the right person into your life.

I can remember PT, or physical training, in the Army. We had to wake up before the sunrise and do all types of exercises like push-ups, sit-ups, and runs. Somewhat sadistically the Drill Sergeants would make us yell out during these exercises, “I like. I love it. I want some more of it!” But you know what, it was hard but they were right. We got stronger. We got more disciplined. Physical fitness is a matter of life and death for the soldier. Spiritual fitness is a matter of life and death for the Christian.

And as we heard earlier we have to endure. Remember verse 11, *“For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant.”* This is most certainly true. But always keep the “big picture” in view. As we sang in our hymn of the day, *“When life’s troubles rise to meet me, Though their weight May be great, They will not defeat me.”* Martin Luther noted the many things that come against God’s people and then asked, *“If His judgment begins at the house of God, what will be the end of those who do*

*not believe the Gospel?”* What awaits them is damnation and eternal punishment. But for God’s redeemed what awaits is what verse 22 told us, *“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering.”*

Yes, God as Hebrews 12 tells us does shake the heavens and earth. But in this shaking, *“the things that cannot be shaken may remain”* (v27). The things that are of God, the eternal things, remain. The devil cannot steal our faith or salvation. Verse 28, *“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.”* It is in Christ that our sins are forgiven and we eagerly, yet patiently, await that day when all sinful desire is removed from us and we are made righteous in heaven. In this we can learn to love the discipline of God and understand that His discipline is indeed loving. OUR FATHER GOD DISCIPLINES HIS CHILDREN SO THAT WE MAY GROW AS FAITHFUL AND HOLY DISCIPLES. I leave you with the Word of the Lord from Hebrews 12:24, *“and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”*

Amen.