

Hebrews 12:5-13 "My Son, Do Not Regard Lightly The Discipline Of The Lord"

Our text last week keyed in on the importance of not throwing in the towel when the going got tough. These Hebrew Christians were experiencing persecution in many forms and their trials were being utilized by God to strengthen them for the battle. But our writer realized that the battles we face will tempt us to grow weary and lose heart to the point where we may become ineffective in the Kingdom of God, which is exactly what the enemy wants.

Last week we saw how if we are to get the proper perspective on this battle then we must look to Christ which is what we saw in HEB 12:3-4 "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. 4 In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."

In these two passages we saw how our sinless Savior submitted to persecution, and ultimately death, for our sake in accomplishing the will of His Father to bring a people into a peaceful relationship through the shed blood of Christ.

If trials of this magnitude in our Lord's life were used by our heavenly Father to accomplish His will unto our salvation, can we not look with spiritual eyes to see how trials in our own lives can be used by God to increase our endurance to run this race of faith found in Christ?

This is where our writer is going in the next few verses. He is reminding his readers, which of course includes you and me, in Christ, that simply because we have trials in life does not mean that God has forgotten about us or has neglected us or is just toying with us. He loves us too much for those considerations.

Our text this morning begins with a reminder that we are not classified as only people created in the image of God, as are all people, but rather we are actually His children, unlike the rest of the world who have not embraced Him as Lord and Savior.

The world would have us believe that if there is a God then we are all His children. This simply isn't so. The unbeliever cannot claim God as his father in a redemptive sense. This is the point Jesus was making to the antagonistic Jews of His day.

JOH 8:40-45 "As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. 41 You are doing the things your own father does." "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself." 42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. 43 Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!"

This is the truth about the world and was the truth concerning ourselves outside of Christ. But, for us in Christ, this no longer applies and what our writer is going to remind us of is that if we are sons and daughters then we will receive special attention from our Father in Heaven who only has our best interest in mind.

HEB 12:5-6 "And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." (Prov. 3:11,12)

Let's begin with the first part of verse 5.... "And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:..." These Hebrew Christians were probably very concerned with the trials they were experiencing at the hands of unbelievers which could have included family and friends.

In the process they may have felt as though they were somehow forgotten by God since life was now getting tough and the Lord seemed to be silent. What our writer infers is that instead of God being silent He is loudly proclaiming how they are sons and daughters whom God is intimately involved with at this particular time in their lives which seems so hard. He's not far away, He's right in the midst of the trouble with them.

This is why our writer says, "And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:..." They, as we, needed to be reminded that God is treating us as sons and daughters. The implication is that to be a son or daughter of God He must be our real heavenly Father. As such His Fatherly love is engaged in a

way to actually help us be the sons and daughters He wants us to be.

Our writer then quotes from an O.T. passage found in PRO 3:11-12 "My son, do not despise the LORD'S discipline and do not resent his rebuke, 12 because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in."

This is an important lesson for all of us in Christ because we're all prone to despise the Lord's discipline. The idea of despising here is to take lightly or have little regard for. To do that we would have to understand that the discipline we receive is little more than a misfortune or just part of life or maybe the feeling that God doesn't really care and so we move on without considering His involvement. We'll deal with our situation in our own way, without considering His ever present involvement in our lives.

It's not seeing the situation with spiritual eyes. This too could have been the case with the readers of this original letter. They may have thought that life in general was down on them because of their faith in Christ. In the world's vernacular, they just had some "bad luck" by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. They had forgotten God's personal involvement in their lives at the very time they needed to see His loving Fatherly hand, even in the midst of trials.

But as we'll see the very trials themselves, often times, are the very things God uses and will bring into our path to accomplish His will in our lives, precisely because He loves us. Now, this is usually where I begin to lose people. Many Christians in the Church-at-large can't comprehend God bringing the trial into our lives in the first place and then saying I will bring you through it.

That almost appears as abusive to some people. And I would agree with our writer in verse 11 "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful." But unfortunately in many cases we can't get past the pain to see the real intent of the discipline, and the love of the One who administers it.

But we'll come to that aspect in a few moments. First let's look at the intent of the Lord's discipline in our lives. HEB 12:6 "..... the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

From an earthly standpoint we can't always comprehend how God can love us and at the same time discipline or punish us. But as we

see in HEB 12:9-10 "Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness."

You and I for the most part grew up with the understanding that there were rules in our homes. And if we did not abide by those rules we were corrected. Now at the time we received the correction we may have thought our parents hated us. But if the truth be known, our parents loved us enough to keep us from going off the path so that we wouldn't hurt ourselves or other people.

When I was growing up there was a rule in our home, among others, that said I couldn't talk back to my mom. I knew better than to talk back to my dad. But I was probably six years old and my brother was 4. We got into some trouble and my mother came down the hall and warned us to stop it. Well, I opened my mouth and she freaked. She ran back to get a paddle.

The paddle was a toy which had a rubber ball attached to it with a long thin rubber band. And the idea was to hit the ball and keep it going. Invariably, we would whack that ball so hard it would break the rubber band. At that point it became the official paddle in the house with my mom who would use on our rear ends at the appropriate times.

Well, she ran to get this paddle and I ran down the hall. Even when I was little I was pretty quick and she drew back to whack my bottom and I dodged out of the way and she came around with that paddle and hit the wall.

I thought she broke her hand. I locked myself in the room. But that's like locking yourself in the lions den. Dad's got to come home sooner or later and if you're locked in your room he knows just where to find you; and he did.

Nobody likes discipline. But without it, there would be chaos and unruliness and we would never learn the hard lessons we need to learn. But when God applies discipline it's never done in a way where He is trying to destroy us or push away from Himself, it's done with the idea of helping us learn and grow so that we will be children who honor Him and love Him and desire to please Him in all things.

That's what our writer means in verse 10 "Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness."

Our fathers and mothers disciplined us in the best way they could as fallible people who are prone to sin as we are. There is no sin with God because He is perfect in all His ways. To be disciplined by our heavenly Father is always just what we need, whether we realize it or not.

Not to be disciplined by God would tell us that we don't belong to His household. This is what we see in HEB 12:8 "If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons."

The picture here is of one who does not belong to the family because he's an illegitimate child. He is outside the realm of that family and therefore does not receive the discipline precisely because he's not in the family.

This is the point of verse 8. If you receive no discipline in one particular family then you are obviously not of that family. Because a family that understands the needs of the children also realizes their need for discipline.

Now, before I go any further let me add here that when we speak of discipline we usually think of corporal type punishment. And that's part of what God has in mind for His children, though He doesn't physically whack us. But that's not the only thing He has in mind nor should we when we discipline our children.

The idea of discipline also carries with it the necessity of discipleship. If we are not instructing our children in the process then we've missed the point of what discipline is really trying to accomplish.

This is what Paul said in Eph.6:4 "And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Provoking a child to anger is to bring that child up with no direction. They don't know what's required of them and they're confused. Discipline and instruction are essential.

Discipline comes in all sorts of degrees. You don't mete out the same discipline to your child in one situation as you might in another. It will often vary. But always we should discipline to instruct. And often times the instruction will come through a hard

lesson they might have to learn through, what the Scriptures call, the rod.

The word of God does not promote child abuse. But it does promote the proper use of discipline. And again, what we know to be true is that if we are children of God through faith in Christ He will always give the type of discipline to instruct us. It doesn't always mean we will get the point the first time around, but He's loving enough to continue until we do so that we might learn to be children who love Him and serve Him.

I like what Moses told the nation of Israel when they were tempted not to obey God.

DEU 4:34-36 "Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? 35 You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other. 36 From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you. On earth he showed you his great fire, and you heard his words from out of the fire."

God got their attention. He placed many testings in their path to prove their faith and in the process they saw that He was the Lord God. Sometimes God wants to get our attention for the same reason. Our faith grows weak and we doubt and we grumble against our Lord. And in the affairs of life He will lovingly remind us that He is still God and that He wants our full allegiance.

It may not be pleasant in the process, but if He didn't intervene then He would prove that we were not His children and He was not our Father. That's the reason we can rejoice in various trials knowing that the testing our faith produces endurance which God Himself is working out in our lives.

He wants you and me to be strong in Him and go forward representing Him faithfully in this world. But it should be pointed out that when we talk about discipline we are not talking about punishing for sin as though He were keeping a list and is now getting back at us.

The idea of punishing or disciplining has nothing to do with your redemptive position with Christ. In other words, God is not disciplining us to have us pay back some debt for our sin. We hear

the expression of convicted felons who have been punished for their crimes, "I've paid my debt to society."

You and I could never pay our debt to God for the wrong we've done. That's not what God is asking of us when He disciplines us. What kind of good work could you do or what penance could you perform for your sin to make you right in the eyes of God?

Remember what Paul said in EPH 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - 9 not by works, so that no one can boast."

We are truly disciplined only after we've come to Christ and confess that there's nothing we could do to earn His favor. Prior to coming to Christ in repentance and faith, we came under, not Fatherly discipline, but under condemnation to suffer His wrath.

ROM 8:1 "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, .." Our discipline is not a way of paying God back for our sins. Our discipline is designed by God to keep us from further sin which would dishonor Him. And sometimes God will do something preemptive even before we do sin, which might require discipline as he sees fit.

Paul was a man who loved the Lord and followed Him faithfully. But the Lord loved Paul enough to discipline him for that which could have been a problem with Paul in the future.

2CO 12:7-9 "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

Paul received the discipline for what it was, an opportunity to grow stronger in Christ and better serve Him in the process. You and I may not have the honor of personally hearing from Christ as did Paul, but we have the very words of God as our Lord has graciously revealed them to us in His Word.

If we read and meditate upon His word we are reading and meditating upon the very mind and heart of God for us. And if God says, those whom I love I discipline than we must by faith come to Him, as did Paul, and conclude that His grace will be sufficient for

us to go through this trial which He may put our path for our instruction.

Granted, there may be things that God is teaching that we simply don't see. That's why we want to come to Him and ask for eyes to see and ears to hear. I've wondered at times over the last five years why I and my family have had to hoe such a hard road at times, where the opposition and spiritual warfare has been so fierce over a piece of spiritual real estate which seem so insignificant in the larger scheme of things.

And I've asked the Lord, 'why God does Satan seem to come against such a small band of believers when he could be busy dealing with a lot bigger churches'; not that I wish him on anyone else. But, the testings and trials have been hard for all of us at times. And His answer to me is always the same. For whom much is given much is required.

God is doing a work here that you and I may not fully see. But He is building a foundation here that He wants to stand firm until the end and a light that will shine uncompromisingly. We're part of a work that is being fashioned by God Himself and like a diamond in the rough is being measured and cut under the watchful eye and loving hand of God.

And if the fire seems to be too hot at times we need to quickly go to God and ask for His help in time of need, not despising or taking lightly His discipline for our instruction, but rather to accept it for what it is; an opportunity to grow because He has plans for us.

PRO 15:32-33 "He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding. 33 The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor."

This is why we are told to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. Because the same hand that humbles us is the same hand that will exalt us one day.

Let's go to HEB 12:11 "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

We are children of the living God but we are also soldiers of Jesus Christ. He is training us for His purposes because He loves us. Boot camp may not be a pleasant experience, but without it you would never be able to survive the warfare you are being trained for.

God wants us to have a child-like faith but He wants us to view our life in Him in a mature way that can see afflictions and trials and testings as something He is using for our good. I like the way Paul puts it in 1CO 14:20 "Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults."

The personal attention we receive from our God in the way of discipline and instruction is designed to produce something in our lives and that is a "harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

You can't harvest unless you first plant seeds and nurture the ground. God has planted us in His field. He has given us life in Christ and He prunes and cuts and tends His vineyard with the express purpose of gaining a harvest in our lives. That harvest is a life sold out to Christ, a life which follows Him anywhere, a life filled with His righteousness and peace, enabling us to go out into this world with that life from Him and give it away in the name and in the love of Christ. And ultimately that harvest He's worked in our lives will bring Him all glory.

Having said all this our writer now wants to encourage us not to grow weary or faint-hearted.

HEB 12:12-13 "Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. 13 "Make level paths for your feet," (Prov. 4:26) so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed."

Our Lord knows the process of discipline and instruction can be a hard one for us at times; it can be very painful. But He wants us to engage our faith and love for Him so that we might trust Him in the way He is dealing with us.

In the process He wants us to look to Christ but He also wants us to look to where He wants us to be. "Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees." How do we do that in the midst of trials and testings from God? First, knowing that when He tests and disciplines us He also gives us the way to go through it.

He is our strength. Moses understood this. He was a man who didn't have the strength to lead Israel and in fact he pleaded with God that his brother Aaron might be the one to go to His people. But we read in EXO 15:2-3 "The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. 3 The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name."

Moses discovered that God's strength can deliver and God's strength can enable us to go forward. But if the hands are weak and the knees are feeble how will we go out to battle? We won't! We must come to the One who can lift up our heads and strengthen us for the work He has for us. David understood this.

2SA 22:33-37 "It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. 34 He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights. 35 He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. 36 You give me your shield of victory; you stoop down to make me great. 37 You broaden the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn."

Will He do any less for us? No! He means to use us if we will submit to Him and follow Him into battle. This is why He spends so much time preparing us. The preparation may seem hard at times but the victory will be so sweet. The victory of standing before Him and having Him say, enter good and faithful servant.

As we end with verse 13 we read "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed."

This is taken from PRO 4:26-27; 5:1-2 "Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. 27 Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.

5:1 My son, pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight, 2 that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge."

Sometimes we'll choose a road we know we shouldn't travel. It's not a level place and we place ourselves in jeopardy of becoming lame as we stumble around moving from left to right and making our own path.

May we walk the path He has set before us. May we say with David in PSA 119:32-37 "I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free. 33 Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. 34 Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. 35 Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. 36 Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. 37 Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word."

Let's run with endurance the race that He has set before us and may we run it in His strength and not grow weary. And as we run may we allow the world to see that the life we possess is life in Christ.