

Hebrews 12:1-16 • God's Work of Discipline

Introduction

The Greek word for disciple came to be used in ancient Greece to describe the relationship between an apprentice learning a trade from his master. The expansion of this concept was taken to its pinnacle by Judaism in the time of Christ. In order to become a rabbi, a disciple left his home, moved in with his teacher, served him personally, and treated him as the absolute authority. The disciple was not only expected to learn everything the rabbi knew, but to become like him in character and attitude. In return, the rabbi provided food, lodging, and saw his teaching transmitted to future generations through the disciple. Think about this relationship as you study how God's discipline is intended for our benefit.

¹Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

[Read v.1-2]

Q: What does the reference to “so great a cloud of witnesses” refer to?

A: All the examples illustrating faith in the previous chapter of Hebrews. They are not merely examples to us, but since they continue to actually live in the presence of God, their earthly example effectively becomes a testimony by which our own faith is measured. They are therefore “witnesses” to the quality of **OUR** faithfulness.

Q: What is significant about the author's phrase “let us also lay aside”?

A: It's encouraging us to put into practice the example of faithfulness of all these noted role models. A common behavior shared by all of them is that they made the choice to lay aside anything interfering with their ability to be faithful to God and God alone. They set aside earthly circumstances in favor of focusing on His will. So should we, in the same manner, choose to lay aside all distraction and sin.

Q: Is it enough to “run...the race”? Although we know we can do nothing apart from God, what is OUR responsibility in this relationship?

A: We must “run with endurance”. It takes effort and patience and persistence on our part—**endurance**. It's more than just casual participation.

Q: How is it indicated here that God will help us to “run with endurance”?

A: “...fixing our eyes on Jesus...” To finish a race, one must focus on the end goal, in this case “Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith” who is the most involved in our successfully achieving this pursuit.

Q: How did Christ Himself provide to us an example of these very things?

A: He “endured the cross”. He saw beyond the temporary suffering to “the joy set before Him”. In other words, He was fixed on the goal rather than the temporary circumstances. “Despising the shame” means that He did not allow the temporal difficulties to overwhelm His faith that God would bring about all things for His good in the end.

Application: Do you seek “endurance” or “escape”? Have you considered what God is trying to accomplish through even the most difficult of circumstances, that there's a greater purpose?

³For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart

[Read v.3]

Q: An Olympic race event as we envision it today does not have obstacles in the paths of the runners. Where are many of the obstacles that challenge us in this life?

A: Sinners, or those who would like us to fix our eyes on something other than Jesus. (A good example are the people that mocked Jesus on the cross trying to get Him to see that His current circumstances were in no way showing God's work in His life—but how wrong they turned out to be!)

Q: How did Christ serve as an example to show how to deal with this?

A: He “endured such hostility”. Just as Christ saw past the current circumstances to “the joy set before Him” (v.2), so should we endure, fixed on the goal so that in the process of enduring these temporary, present circumstances we “will not grow weary and lose heart”.

Application: Have you considered that the world's hostility towards us personally and our faith in general is to be overcome in Christ? That it **CAN** be overcome?

⁴You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; ⁵and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons,

[Read v.4-8]

Q: Within the context of the author's example of an enduring a sporting event, what is the meaning of resisting “to the point of shedding blood”?

A: Athletes have been known to endure to the point of actually bleeding or shedding blood. The author is pointing out that the readers' personal race has been far from that level of difficulty to this point, but that this is the kind of commitment it may take to strive “against sin” and be successful. That's how important it is to “lay aside...the sin which so easily entangles us.” (v.1)

“MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD,
NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;
⁶FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES,
AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.”

Q: What is the author's point about the true source of discipline?

A: It is from God, acting as the Father that cares how His children live and behave.

⁷It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Q: How does the author extend this teaching of discipline to show it's an indicator of our standing in Christ?

A: Those not so disciplined are characterized as “illegitimate children and not sons”.

Point: You can **SAY** you're “running” the race, but only those whose life and behavior is being changed by endurance of and obedience to God's discipline are actually **IN** the race.

Application: At what point will you give up if endurance becomes too difficult? Are you committed to seeing it through, even “to the point of shedding blood”? Have you considered that a strong indicator of an improving walk in Christ is one whose behavior and faith is being refined and tested? How does this relate to you and others you know?

⁹Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. ¹¹All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

¹²Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, ¹³and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

¹⁴Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; ¹⁶that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.

[Read v.9-11]

Q: What does the author indicate to be the 3 ultimate purposes of God's discipline in our life?

- To "live" (v.9) Not on the road leading to the second death but to eternal life.
- To "share His holiness" (v.10) Separated from this world, wholly devoted to Him.
- To yield "the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (v.11) So committed to obedience of His commandments that our life begins to always **NATURALLY** do the right thing.

Q: So what's another way of looking at discipline according to v.11? How is it further defined to show how it's used by God?

A: Training. It's a tool of God's education process.

Application: *If you were to fix your eyes on Christ, knowing that He is training you for eternal life, holiness, and righteousness, would you be able to better endure His discipline? Would you more willingly cast aside sin or any hindrance? How does this apply to you right now?*

[Read v.12-16]

Q: What are v.12-13 stating within the context of the teaching to this point?

A: It's a call not to give in to the current circumstances as the world sees them—which has the effect of weakening us—but to get back on God's course and become strengthened through our commitment to His working.

Q: What are the 3 areas we need to work on?

1. **Ourselves.** (v.14) We need to obey **BOTH** tablets of the Law to love God with all our heart ("pursue...sanctification") and love our neighbor ("pursue peace with all men"). These are **OUR** responsibilities.
2. **Others.** (v.15) We are responsible to not create, through our own behavior and actions, hindrances and obstacles for others.
3. **God.** (v.16) We are to refrain from all the things that lead to idolatry—the replacement of God with something else.

Overall Application

- *How does this teaching fit with both our personal goal to be a disciple of Christ, and to make disciples of others?*
- *Share an example of when endurance paid off, when you came to realize a result of God's work that was not readily apparent during the burden of the event. How about an example of the opposite?*
- *In the opening introduction of the example of a 1st century disciple who left his home to move in with his teacher, how do you compare? Have you left the old life completely and "moved in" permanently with Christ? If not, why?*