

## THE DISCIPLINES OF GOD

*a study in the goodness of a loving Father teaching, training, and guiding the lives of  
the children He loves.*

Valley Bible Chapel

Tom V. Taylor

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### **I. General Introduction: The Family of God....**Hebrews 12:1-15

- A. The family of God consists of those who are born into it through faith in the Lord Jesus. In this regard all who believe are designated as the sons of God--children of God. (1 John 3:1). The basic facts are these:

1. The family is essentially spiritual
2. It is entered by the new birth (1 Peter 1:23)
3. It is given identity by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13)
4. It is recognized by the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 2:13)

The family consists of weak and strong members (Romans 14), growing and static members (Hebrews 5), consecrated and carnal members (1 Corinthians 3) and all with various skills, gifts and great diversities in personality! This is a fascinating subject in itself but, unfortunately, it is not the topic of present interest.

- B. As a general description of the family we may say these things.

1. All members are gifted
2. All are loved
3. All have access to the Father, etc.
4. All have individualized status
5. All have spiritual privileges in common
6. All have a common charge in relation to the Lord
7. All are instructed to obey
8. And all are under the same disciplines of God.

- C. The challenge in Hebrews 12 to the members of the family is developed on these lines:

1. Prepare to live (v. 1)
2. Keep your attention on the Lord Jesus (v 2-3)
3. Do not exaggerate your problems (v.4)
4. Remember the Father disciplines us for our good (v. 5-10)
5. Watch for the training purposes in discipline (v 11)
6. And, therefore, walk appropriately (v 12-15)

**II. A Necessary Consideration: What is the will of God for the family? What does He want us to be? What does He want us to do? The disciplines become meaningful in the light of these things.**

**A. The Designated Will of God:**

1. Yieldedness (Romans 12:1-2)
2. Thankfulness (1 Thessalonians 5:18)
3. Holiness (1 Peter 1:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:3)
4. Witnessing (Ephesians 5:17 ff)

**B. The Desired Will of God**

1. Fruitbearing (John 15)
2. Walking worthy (Eph 4:1)
3. Pleasing Him more and more (1 Thessalonians 4:1)
4. Life character (Micah 6:8)

**C. The Demonstrative Will of God**

1. Giftedness (1 Corinthians 12)
2. Service (1 Corinthians 4)
3. Appointments (Ephesians 4)

This is a very abbreviated study but the disciplines to which we will presently come will help us to understand how God guides and directs to the fulfilling of these intentions.

**III. The Disciplines of God:**

**A. Some introductory notes:**

1. The term discipline should not be thought of as a punishment term but training term. The KJV word chastening translates a Greek word that speaks of training as one trains a child and that is why I like to speak of this as discipline and not punishment. The training may have a painful phase now and then and it is not easy to accept correction freely but the wise parent knows that without training the child will not learn proper values, etc. In this study I expand the word discipline to a number of other areas beyond the scope of the Hebrews passage for a wider consideration of our growth!

2. The big fact is that God loves us and in His fatherly wisdom will not permit us to live "untrained." How we respond to the training is another matter!
3. I have divided the disciplines, as I see them, into two areas. The first I call "spiritual" meaning that these are the essential guidelines in Christian living and the second I call "temporal" in that they are life conditioned. And if you do not understand that--I am not sure I do, either. But I will try to make it more plain in discussion and you are free to question, denounce, or come up with wording of your own!

B. The Spiritual Disciplines...not punishing in any sense but guiding in development and Christian maturity.

1. Worship

- a. By definition, worship is the heart's adoration of God. It is an occupation of gratitude and wonder.
- b. Biblical Instruction:
  - (1). The great commandment Deuteronomy 6:5
  - (2) The desire of the Father: John 4:23
  - (3) The plea of the faithful: Psalms 95-96
  - (4) The Revelation scene: Revelation 4-5
- c. In practice:

The concept is that we prostrate ourselves before God that His greatness may be seen. We are assigning to Him the pre-eminent place that is His.
- d. As a discipline, worship trains us to:
  - (1) stay humble
  - (2) recognize authority (sovereignty)
  - (3) appreciate grace
  - (4) re-order life in respect of our Lord

2. Prayer:

- a. By definition prayer is talking with God. It may involve praise, intercession, worship, etc., but basically it is our hearts reaching out to Him in a verbalized sense.



b. Biblical Instruction:

- (1) God's call *John 33-3*
- (2) Giving instruction: Matthew 6:1-15
- (3) The exhortation: Luke 18:1
- (4) The assurance: John 14:13
- (5) The key: John 14:14
- (6) The Lord's example: John 17

c. In practice:

See James 4...we have not because.....

- d. As a discipline prayer develops our fellowship and dependence on God. It teaches us lessons about grace and love and also helps us to be patient and wait thus conditioning us for action when the time comes. One can live without praying but not live very well! It is a necessary part of every believing life....we are taught, encouraged, and guided to be people of prayer in every phase of life.

3. Fellowship

- a. By definition fellowship is partnering with another for some particular cause. It is a matter of working together and accomplishing in union what one could not do alone. It is expressed in the life of Paul in Philippians 4 and the plain fact is that the Apostle was dependent on the Lord as well as those who were fellow-workers with him.

b. Biblical Instruction...much by example but:

- (1) Acts 2:42 "they continued"
- (2) Hebrews 10:25 "forsake not"

c. In Practice:

- (1) Sharing: 2 Corinthians 7-8
- (2) Working: 2 Corinthians 6: 1 ff
- (3) Partnering: Philippians 4; Galatians 2:9

d. Fellowship, as a discipline,

- (1) opens us to the correction and helping of others
- (2) ~~makes~~ makes us aware of the importance of our contributions to the body at large
- (3) ~~gives~~ gives added strength to every duty or endeavor.

#### 4. Study

- a. By definition study is the application of the mind to the understanding of truth and the meaning and application of the Word of God.
- b. Biblical instruction:
  - (1) 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14 ff
  - (2) 1 Peter 2:2
- c. In practice:
  - (1) Acts 2:42
  - (2) Acts 15:15 ff
  - (3) Acts 20:20 ff
- d. As a discipline, study challenges us to concentrate on the eternal and life changing truths of God and His Word. Mere fleshly study can be exhausting (Ecclesiastes 12) but the study of the Word of God is invigorating and one will never study too much or come to the point where one "knows it all."

#### C. The Temporal Disciplines

Whereas our first four disciplines were essentially spiritual and matters of the heart, these are disciplines somewhat external and confining. Some are thought of as "punishments" but that is much too narrow a designation for our overall thinking. In the study of these we often meet judgments and pronouncements...of which we must exercise great care since the work is of the Father and not of us....and I will try to explain that in some limited way.

##### 1. The Discipline of Adversity

- a. By definition: When things just go against you! It should not be a case of deliberate or personal disobedience---not a product of impetuous or careless behavior. It is a matter of contrary events going against you....somehow allowed in the will of God!
- b. The character of adversity: 2 Corinthians 1:16-28
  - trials of life
  - persecution
  - travel disorders

- fatigue, lack of rest
- personal disappointment.
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c. Some Biblical examples:

- (1) Paul
- (2) Job
- (3) Nehemiah

d. Why?

e. The purposes served....a compilation:

- (1) A gain in personal perspective
- (2) A realization of dependence
- (3) A demonstration of power
- (4) A broadening of testimony

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f. Some facts to be remembered in the case of adversity:

- (1) God never leaves us: Hebrews 13:5  
2 Timothy 4:17
- (2) He does not allow us to be tested beyond our  
capacity 1 Corinthians 10:13
- (3) He has a program for our perfection 1 Peter 5:10
- (4) His ultimate purposes do not fail!

g. Therefore, when things go wrong:

- (1) don't feel guilty (unless)
- (2) don't give up
- (3) check the resources
- (4) remember the Divine history
- (5) and live in faith....doing the will of God.

2. The Discipline of Time: Ecclesiastes 3; Psalms 90 and 39

- a. By definition: God allows us a certain amount of time---the exact amount we do not know---and challenges us to use what we have wisely (Colossians 4:5).
- b. The character of time: it is always moving on at the same steady pace (Psalm 39) and cannot be recovered when it



is gone. God's reckoning of time varies from our short view of it (2 Peter 3)

c. Some interesting Biblical notes:

- (1) Jonah... 'yet forty days' (a judgment decree)
- (2) John 2 "my hour is not yet...."
- (3) Proverbs 6:9-10 (the attitude of the sluggard)
- (4) Jacob's week: Genesis 29:20

d. The purposes in this discipline may be summarized thus:

- (1) we are challenged to make every day count
- (2) Since time cannot be recovered we should think well on how it is used
- (3) but we also know that God "takes His time" and is neither hurried nor tardy--even though we are sometimes anxious to push him a bit.
- (4) consequently when things are done in an orderly way there is no regret...time challenges us to be precise and practical.

e. The great challenge is to be a good steward of time and to allow the "clock" to remind us of the need to serve God now!

### 3. The Discipline of Waiting.

a. By definition this is the training of not knowing what the Lord wants us to do and we must be patient, prayerful, and purposed to obedience. It is not a matter of just "standing around" but one of uncertainty in the course of action. It can be a very trying discipline because we may want to be up and running while we do not yet know the track or the goal!

b. Making the most of waiting:

- (1) Be patient: James 1:2-3 ff
- (2) Be hopeful: Romans 5:4-5
- (3) Stay ready: Philippians 1:23-25
- (4) Remember how God accomplishes His work: James 5:7

c. Some Biblical examples:

- (1) Proverbs 3:5 ff
- (2) The Macedonian call: Acts 16:9 in full context

- d. Some of the purposes in "waiting"
  - (1) better preparation of the servant!
  - (2) assurance of the proper or correct path
  - (3) arrangements of details beyond our scope
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- e. The great challenge is to allow patience to have her perfect work (James 1)

#### 4. Temporal Punishments

- a. By definition This discipline defines a situation in which God metes out an immediate (in most cases) punishment for a temporal disobedience. We must be careful in discernment in this area for not everything that happens is a Divine rebuke: this is, in fact, uncommon. We need to live in a circumspect way under the will of God and stay sensitive to His Word and our personal commitment....and we must be very careful about being judges of others.
- b. The character of this discipline:
  - (1) A sudden destruction (Acts 5: Ananias and Sapphira) or an immediate affliction ( 1 Kings 13: Jeroboam at the altar). A similar case is that of Hananiah in Jeremiah 28 and that of Herod (Acts 12:21-23)
  - (2) An administrative act of justice with more long term events serving as a general warning. The case of Miriam in Numbers 12 may be seen as such and the judgment of the offending believer in 1 Corinthians 5 is in a similar category. The general statement of 1 Corinthians 11:30 is probably also applicable.
- c. Further Biblical illustrations:
  - (1) Sodom and Gomorrah
  - (2) The judgments on the Revelation churches  
-Revelation 1-3
  - (3) The self admonition of Paul---1 Corinthians 9:27
- d. The purposes in this sort of discipline may be summarized so:
  - (1) To teach the seriousness of commitment to the Lord
  - (2) To correct quickly situations that threaten the holiness of God



- (3) To warn, in general, of the power of the Lord's justice.
  - (4) And to certify the fact that God is working and is exact in His conditioning
- e. This discipline of temporal punishment is not intended to scare us or make us doubt God's love. We know from the book of Job that God does not deal on a "tit for tat" basis and many of the life limitations have nothing to do with punishment but are the mere products on our race. We must be very discerning in any study on these lines but it would be best if we were all quick and eager to do His will!

## 5. Suffering

- a. By definition this is one of the most difficult disciplines to discuss. This is the training that comes with the limitations of life and the weakness of a body showing the highly developed consequences of sin (Adam's fall...) It has some of the marks of adversity but is not the same thing. It will include aspects of persecution but is more than just that. Perhaps it is easiest to say that whatever hurts one is a matter of suffering.
- b. The character of suffering...
  - (1) rebuke for being a Christian: 1 Peter 4
  - (2) weakness in the flesh: 2 Corinthians 12
  - (3) illness: 3 John (Gaius)
  - (4) any pain producing trial: 1 Peter 5:10
- c. Biblical illustrative matter on the discipline of suffering
  - (1) the Lord Jesus: Hebrews 2:10; 5:8; 12:2
  - (2) all who live godly: 2 Timothy 3:12
  - (3) the servants of faith in God: Hebrews 11
  - (4) the course of life in general: Ecclesiastes 12
- d. The purpose in suffering...well, it is not always possible to define it in exact terms in every situation but some general purposes seem clear:
  - (1) learning dependence
  - (2) preparation for blessing
  - (3) learning to comfort and empathize
  - (4) challenging for new directions

(5) learning humility and understanding of others

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e. Some further Biblical materials for thought:

- (1) Israel's suffering in Egypt
- (2) The Babylonian captivity
- (3) The early church (Acts 1-12)

f. It is not our intention to develop a philosophy of suffering that will cover all points. But it is apparent that suffering is one of the great disciplines of life and the best general concept is stated by Peter in 1 Peter 4:19

## 6. Personal Frustration

a. By definition: This discipline is influenced by personality and behavior. Whether the frustration is providentially designed or a common life occurrence is not always easy to say. But whatever the source, it is used of God to train us and it occurs most frequently in the use of our wills to encourage others. We want to see them change and grow and it does not happen as we wish it would! Personal frustration sets in with a bang! Galatians 3 shows how it figures into the ministry of Paul...and there is some indication of a similar training for him in Philippians 4.

b. The character of this frustration:

- (1) People are swayed from the truth: Galatians 3...people who should know better but don't think!
- (2) Some balk at concepts of grace 2 Timothy 2:17-18  
4:14
- (3) Some are slow or rebellious at the idea of spiritual growth: 2 Corinthians 13
- (4) Some refuse to serve in humility and integrity  
2 John: Diotrephes
- (5) Those who mistake the blessings of grace for indulgence in life: the carnal minded: 1 Corinthians 3 and you will think of many others...enough to make one's hair fall out---if it has not gone already,.

c. But think of God's patient dealing with us:

- (1) Psalm 107
- (2) 1 Corinthians 6
- (3) 1 Peter 4

- d. The purposes served by these frustration are these, along with others that will come to your mind:
  - (1) yieldedness to God should be our goal
  - (2) relying on the work of the Spirit is the key
  - (3) showing spiritual values to others is our great privilege and our best help.
- e. Some positive illustrations are in the Bible:
  - (1) John Mark
  - (2) the Corinthian fellowship as seen in 2 Corinthians
  - (3) Paul's Galatian ministry
- f. In the long run.....frustration over personal affairs should turn us to God and the sooner we move that way...the better we are.

#### **IV. Conclusion and Summary**

We have not discussed all of the disciplines nor any of them to the fullest extent. Our work has surveyed many, however, and the intention is that we should live being encouraged by the work of God in our lives even if some of it is a bit painful. God wants us to grow and by His grace has given us the opportunity of following His Word and accepting with thanks His dealings in our lives. He loves us...that is the basic truth...and no father who loves his children allows them to grow in ruin without his urging to a better standard. Our heavenly Father is the great master and example.