

Heavenly Discipline
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"For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom 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?" (Hebrews 12:6-7 ESV)

Discipline is not only punishment, but it is also direction as in, "I follow the discipline of daily bible reading, or prayer." Or in the case of someone in another profession, they talk about the 'discipline' of investing or even physical labor such as carpentry or plumbing. Everything has a discipline, including being a follower of Jesus Christ. Sometimes discipline is punishment, and we need it when we are disobeying God. Thank God that He disciplines us! God uses our sufferings and struggles to focus us on things that last and things that are most important. Because we sin, we get going in the wrong direction, and we get selfish and self-centered. If we keep going in this direction, the end result will not be good.

The writer of Hebrews is telling us that we should look at things that happen in our lives as discipline. Not that God is causing bad things to happen, but that the effects of those bad decisions and actions (the pain that we experience, hard times we go through, etc.) God allows it to happen for our discipline, to get us back on track. He loves us enough to do that!

Look at the example of Christ. "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." (Heb 12:4 ESV) Obviously a rhetorical question! None of us has suffered as Christ suffered. If He went through that kind of suffering, should we expect anything different in our lives? No. Besides, if we can see a good result coming out of our suffering, then that makes suffering more bearable. "...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb 12:2 ESV) Jesus endured the suffering because He saw the joy that would come out of it, which is forgiveness and salvation for us! Could the same be true for our suffering? The writer of Hebrews would argue, yes! As Jesus endured, so we can endure, knowing that there is a benefit, thanks to God's discipline and grace. "Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." (Heb 12:3 ESV)

That's different than saying God has a purpose for everything, as if God were responsible for our suffering or that somehow He planned it. God's plan was for our ultimate good when He created us and put us in Eden. We sin and curse ourselves with suffering and death. But, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:16-17 ESV)

Thank God that He loves us and loves us enough to discipline us. "If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. (Hebrews 12:8 ESV). We are not illegitimate children, we are daughters and sons of God!

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us and disciplining us for our good. Give us grace to trust You and to follow Your ways. When we go astray and when we need direction, in Your Fatherly way, discipline us for our good, and when we repent, forgive us for Jesus' sake. It's in His Name we pray. Amen.