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GOD'S LOVING DISCIPLINE

Hebrews 12:4-17

Intro: To be a good runner, you need training!

I. Understanding God's Discipline (v.4-11)

- A. Reasons for God's Discipline—Why do we need it?
 - o God disciplines in order to correct our sin (example: coach makes you run because of bad behavior)
 - o God disciplines us in order to train/shape us (example: coach makes you run to increase endurance)
 - o *Both* types of discipline are present in this passage (and in our lives)
- B. The Means of God's Discipline—How does he do it?
 - o The "struggle" (v.4) endured by the audience involved various earthly trials: persecution, slander, imprisonment (10:32-34), but not "to the point of shedding blood" (v.4)
 - o Discipline involves "painful" (v.11) things. If it doesn't hurt, it's not discipline!
 - "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world." C.S. Lewis
 - o Does this mean all earthly trials are due to our sin? No (John 9:3), but some are (John 5:14)
- C. The Purpose of God's Discipline—What's he trying to accomplish?
 - o Discipline comforts us: it proves we are really God's children (v.6-9)
 - Paradoxically, discipline is not a sign God is against you, but a sign that he is for you!
 - "the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son" (v.6; Prov 3:12)
 - This is even true for earthly fathers
 - o Think how difficult it is to consistently discipline a child. It's hard work!
 - o You only do this hard work if you really love a child
 - Key point: A smooth, easy life may not be the good sign you think it is! And the hard life of trials may not be the curse you think it is!



- o Discipline changes us: it makes us more holy (v.10-11)
 - Discipline is “for our good that we may share his holiness” (v.10)
 - Discipline yields “fruit of righteousness” (v.11)
 - Unlike imperfect human discipline, we can trust God’s discipline is always for our good because He’s perfect

**Key Point: God wants you to finish the race! So, he disciplines you to make you a better (more holy) runner

II. Responding to God’s Discipline (v.12-17)

A. Don’t Ignore It

- o Some dismiss God’s discipline: “do not regard lightly the Lord’s discipline” (v.5)
- o Affliction alone does not produce good results. We must respond to it by faith!

B. Don’t Quit

- o You keep running
 - Training is wearisome work that makes one consider quitting, but we can’t give up
 - “Lift up your drooping hands, strengthen your weak knees” (v.12) is a picture of a weary runner who keeps going
 - “make straight paths for your feet” (v.13) refers to staying on the path of righteousness and not diverting
- o Help others keep running
 - “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God” (v.15)
 - The “root of bitterness” (v.15) is a reference to Deut 29:18 where God’s people turned away to other gods

C. Pursue Holiness

- o God disciplines us because holiness is essential to seeing God
 - “without [holiness] no one will see the Lord” (v.14)
 - Does this mean we’re saved by our obedience? No, holiness is not the condition of salvation, but the consequence of salvation
- o Key Threat to Our Holiness: The Pursuit of Pleasure
 - When suffering under trials, there is a temptation to seek physical pleasures



- Esau sought physical/sensual pleasure:
 - He was “sexually immoral” (v.16) probably a reference to his pagan wives
 - He “sold his birthright for a single meal” (v.16)—he gave up a long-term blessing for a brief moment of pleasure!
 - Such pursuits can lead one to apostasy: “he found no chance to repent” (v.17)



Discussion Groups

1. How does this passage change your perception of the trials in your life? How does it affect your view of God and his purposes?

2. How are you responding to God's discipline today in both good and bad ways? Honestly share about your struggles and successes.

3. How is Esau's example relevant for our lives today? In what ways do you need to be careful about the pursuit of pleasure?

