

Instruction and Correction

Christ is Enough Series

Hebrews 12:4-11

Pastor Bryan Clark

It's reported that Tom Landry, the legendary football coach for the Dallas Cowboys, once said, "The job of a coach is to get men to do what they don't want to do in order to be what they've always wanted to be...to get men to do what they don't want to do in order to be what they've always wanted to be!" It seems to me the writer of Hebrews says something very similar in Hebrews, Chapter 12, and that's what we want to talk about today. If you have a Bible, turn with me to Hebrews 12.

In chapter 11, the writer reminded us of the great heroes of the faith. He called them witnesses or testifiers to their belief in God and His faithfulness. Rolling into chapter 12 there's kind of a play on words: these witnesses then actually become eye witnesses as they fill the arena to watch their teammates who are now running the race, and they cheer them on. I think the intent is to motivate and encourage. Therefore he says, knowing that, *"Then we run with endurance. We lay aside the encumbrance and the sin that entangles us and we focus on Jesus who is the author, the trailblazer, Jesus who is the perfecter, the completer, who is going to finish what He started all the way to the finish line."* If you read between the lines of some of this discussion and go back and tap into what we've learned in the book of Hebrews, it's fairly obvious that these are primarily Jewish Christians who are undergoing difficult circumstances, maybe some level of persecution, and there are probably the Judaizers, the Jewish legalists, who are suggesting that if the new covenant was true, then they should be experiencing God's favor. Instead they're experiencing hard times; they're experiencing persecution. Therefore they're suggesting they need to come back to the old covenant, or at least parts of the old covenant. So, the book of Hebrews is written to them to say that's not true. The old covenant is obsolete; it's finished; it's been replaced by a new covenant, and the new covenant is a better covenant built on better promises, that brings a better hope, that leads us to a better city. Therefore, they have to better understand why sometimes life gets hard. Verse 3 is kind of like the hinge into that conversation we talked about last week, which was the reminder. Think about what happened when Jesus Himself walked on this earth and the hostility He experienced from sinners. Jesus Himself said, "They hated Me; they're going to hate you. They persecuted Me; they're going to persecute you." So, there needs to be a perspective that this isn't going to be easy. This is going to be hard. We didn't board a cruise ship. We did board a battleship. So he says, "Know that, so that you don't lose heart and give up." It's this reminder that this race is difficult and challenging, which gets us to verse 4:

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

**"MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD,
NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;
FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES,
AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."** (*NASB, Hebrews 12:4-6)

So the basic idea of verse 3 and now rolling into verse 4 is to regain some perspective. Sometimes when we struggle, sometimes when we suffer, sometimes when we go through difficult stuff, it's easy to lose perspective. Sometimes when I've heard people going through stuff, I'll hear somebody say, "Oh it's just like Job," and I want to say, "It's not *anything* like Job! You know you need to regain some perspective. Go back and read the Job story. It was horrible!" Just because we're going through something difficult doesn't mean suddenly we're living the life of Job. Life on this earth at times is going to be very hard. So the writer says, **You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.** Now what does he mean by that?

Imagine a group of people that are struggling; they're hurting. They're probably at some level of persecution. We saw that in chapter 10. So, the encouragement of the writer is, "Hang in there; at least you're not bleeding." Maybe we should add that to the Spiritual Care Ministry—that when people come and they're hurting and they're struggling and they're looking for comfort, we say to them, "Hey, cheer up. At least you're not bleeding." (*laughter*) So what is he saying there? Well, the shedding of blood is almost always a reference to death. So these people haven't yet suffered to the degree that Jesus suffered. The idea is, "Go back to verses 2 and 3 and remember; get some perspective; this is what Jesus did for you." So Jesus is not asking you to do something He wasn't willing to do for you—as a matter of fact, just the opposite. None of us have suffered anywhere close to or ever will suffer anywhere close to what Jesus did for us. So regaining some perspective that this is hard, Jesus said it was going to be hard. But this is what Jesus did for you and now He's asking you to trust Him through difficult circumstances on this earth. There's kind of a mix of metaphors. The word **resisted** is a military phrase. The term **striving** is an athletic term. It's the word from which we get our word *agony*. It means to agonize all the way to the finish line, and to finish the race.

Starting then in verse 5, he quotes from Proverbs chapter 3 and he says, "I think you've forgotten something, basically something that God taught you in Proverbs chapter 3. If you remember when we were in Proverbs, it's the imagery of a father teaching or mentoring his son, and that's what he's talking about. **"My son, do not regard lightly..."** It's the same Greek word translated *despise* in verse 2. "Don't despise **the discipline of the Lord.**" Now this term **discipline** is very helpful. It's a term that means *to teach or to instruct* and may include correction. So it's really helpful to understand discipline isn't punitive; discipline isn't punishment. Discipline is teaching; it's instruction; it's correction in order that we may run the race well. Now this is Proverbs, and Proverbs often uses what we call *synonymous parallelism*—and I know you're just tickled to know that—but the point is the second line is just a repeat of the first line. So, **"Nor faint when you are reproved by Him"** is saying the same thing again.

In verse 6, **"For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines.** He teaches; He instructs; He corrects. He doesn't do that because He's mad at you. He doesn't do that because He's disappointed in you. He doesn't do that because you need to somehow pay for past sins. He's doing that because He loves you. He wants to teach you; He wants to instruct you; He wants to help you, but sometimes that involves some correction to get on the right path that's going to lead to life. Then the second part of Verse 6 again is just a different way of saying the same thing.

So at this point, just a couple of comments: What this text uses is the metaphor of parenting, specifically a father parenting his son, as a picture of how God parents...disciplines us. So the primary purpose is for us to understand God's discipline. But it also has a lot of helpful information in instructing us about parenting. So because of time issues, I want to stay focused on God disciplining us, but also I want to let you know that there are two messages—you can find them on

the website or you can find them at the Publication Center—regarding the biblical role of the father and the biblical role of the mother. The father one flows out of this passage; it's got a lot more information for those of you who are parenting that may be helpful.

The other part of this is processing the fact that a passage like this can be very difficult for some people. The metaphor of an earthly father representing your heavenly Father can be really messed up if your experience with your earthly father was not good. Now we refer to this as the *father wound*, and over my years in ministry I have found this to be extremely common—that people struggle from a father wound. Maybe it was an abusive father; maybe it was an unavailable father, a disconnected father. Maybe it was a father where you never measured up; he never believed in you; good was never good enough. Whatever your story is, a lot of people struggle from what we refer to as a *father wound*. For example, it's not uncommon that you find people that seem to genuinely get along with everyone except people in authority, and they just have a clear pattern of always struggling to get along with people in authority. That's almost always indicative of someone with a father wound. People in authority are pushing buttons that go all the way back to the father wound and cause you to react in some way. The real problem theologically is your father wound gets projected onto God as your heavenly Father, and you've created a view of God that's really messed up. And as long as that's true, you stand no real chance of flourishing in your Christian life. I know a lot of people; they're very sincere; they want to trust God; they want to submit to God; they want to surrender to God. They want to experience that intimacy with God that their soul longs for, but it feels like no matter what they try, it just doesn't work—they just never get there. And often the reason is because of a father wound that has now been projected onto God and, if you were to unpack their view of God, God looks an awful lot like their human father. And because of that, there's this breakdown in trust, this breakdown in intimacy. You're never really going to thrive in your Christian walk until you find some level of healing and begin to separate out the difference between your earthly father and your heavenly Father. Now think specifically about this text. If you have a father wound and you've projected that in some way onto your heavenly Father, then every time God tries to help, every time he tries to teach you or instruct you and especially correct you, because your view of God is messed up, you misinterpret that. You think, "God's mad at me. God's trying to get me. God's so unfair. Why does God treat me this way? I'll never measure up. Good enough will never be good enough." And the problem is: your view of God is so messed up because of your father wound, that you just misinterpret God's desire to help, to help you run the race with endurance. This is no small thing. Don't just dismiss this. There are a lot of people that will live and die having never addressed their father wound. In a passage like this, some of you will actually have an emotional, visceral response to it, and it's indicative of the fact that this is tapping into some stuff that's unresolved within you. I'd really encourage you to deal with it. We have a lot of resources that can help with that. All you have to do is contact someone on staff; they'll get you pointed in the right direction. But a passage like this always kind of stirs that up in some people. Verse 7:

It is for discipline that you endure; (It's kind of a clumsy statement there, but what it means is the reason God disciplines you is in order that you will endure. In other words, so you'll run the race like a champion.) **God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline?**

So what you'll see in this text is there's just an assumption: of course a father disciplines his son. Now we kind of read a 21st century permissive culture into some of this, and you really have to go back to 1st century ancient culture to understand it. In a 1st century ancient Roman culture, it was expected that a father would train up and discipline his son. To go from childhood to adulthood was

somewhere around the age thirteen. It was actually a very exact moment. There was typically some sort of celebration. Literally the clothing would change. You wore certain items of clothing that identified you as a child, and when you were officially declared to be a man, you actually wore different clothes, so people visually knew you were officially a man. In the ancient Roman culture, which was hard, which was dangerous, if you were not properly prepared, you did not survive. It was not a 21st century American culture where you can be lazy and irresponsible and live in your parent's basement until you're thirty, and somehow it all works out. That was absolutely not possible! Think about that. At about age thirteen you were officially declared a man, and if you did not learn how to live as a man, you did not survive—and by survive, I mean survive—you did not live! There were so many ways to die; you just wouldn't make it. So there was this strong sense in that culture that the father better train up that son to be a man or else. So that's what the text is referring to. God's not trying to hurt you. God's not mad at you. God's not disgusted with you. God just wants to help. But to do that, He has to teach you and He has to train you and He has to correct you in order that you might be properly prepared to run the race well. Verse 8:

But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

An illegitimate child in Roman culture, typically was like the child of a prostitute or of a slave. The idea was that God disciplines you because you're His child. He's focused on you. He's giving attention to you. Now I understand clearly that whenever I go out and about and do whatever, it is not my responsibility to correct and discipline every child that annoys me. (*laughter*) That's not my job. It is my job to discipline, to teach, and to correct my own children. That's the idea. You're God's child. He loves you. He wants to teach you. He wants to instruct you. He wants to genuinely help you, but sometimes that also has to involve discipline or correction to get your attention, to get you back on the right path in order that you run the race well.

One of the things that I was involved in a lot in my much younger life was athletics. And one of the things you figure out very quickly is if the coach is ignoring you, that's not a good sign. The coach isn't ignoring you because he or she loves you so much. The coach is not ignoring you because he or she thinks you are so exceptional you need no coaching. Usually it is because the coach has determined you will make no real contribution to the team, so you're ignored. When the coach is picking on you, when the coach is yelling at you, when the coach is motivating you, when the coach is challenging you, the coach sees something that causes the coach to believe you can make a significant contribution to the team. You can be far better than you are with some attention, with some coaching, with some motivating. You can be more. It's the same thing with God. It's not that He's mad at you. It's not that He's punishing you. He just wants you to continue to grow, to achieve your potential. Verse 9:

Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject (or submissive) to the Father of spirits, and live?

The Father of spirits is saying your spiritual Father, meaning your heavenly Father, contrasted with your **earthly father** earlier in the verse. So go back to the coaching metaphor. So let's say you have a coach that really invests in you and the other members of the team and the team ultimately excels and wins the championship. You don't resent the coach for that; you respect the coach. The coach took a group of players or an individual and made them better. In the same way, as a parent, when we grow into adulthood, we start to realize all the ways that our parents laid a foundation that we can build on in order that we might live as responsible adults. You don't resent

your parents for that; you respect your parents for that. It's the same imagery. God's just trying to help. Again, if you have a messed-up view of God, you think God's mad at you; you think God's punishing you; you think God's making you pay for past sins. You've completely misinterpreted what God's doing. God's just saying, "You're My child and I want you to run like a champion. And so I want to teach you and I want to instruct you, and sometimes I'm going to have to discipline and correct you." When we go through difficult times, so often we react to God. We're mad at God. We're bitter at God. We're angry with God. We think God's ripped us off. We think God's unfair. We need to really stop and think about, "Wait a minute; that's not what's happening here. God's just trying to help. He's trying to help make us stronger. He's trying to correct us. He's trying to help us run the race like a champion." Verse 10:

For 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.

I think the first part of that verse is actually a concession to the fact that parents don't always get it right. There are no perfect parents. All of us mess up. We all have things we would do differently if we could do it over again. That's the idea. We did what seemed best, but the reality is we don't always get it right. It's also a short season. You go to bed one night; you wake up the next morning and your kids are walking out the door and the season is over. But what's different about God is God always gets it right. Sometimes we as parents, we parent out of anger; we parent out of frustration; we parent out of embarrassment. We parent out of, "Look how you made me look!" We parent out of all kinds of things that aren't good, that don't lead to good parenting—so we don't always get it right. But God *always* gets it right. God is *always* doing it for your good.

One of the things that has really helped me over the years, when I'm going through difficult experiences, is to run it through this grid and remind myself: "Does God hear me when I cry?" "Yes, He's not deaf." "Does God love me?" "Yes, He sent His son to die for me and He's not indifferent." "Does God know what I'm going through?" "Yes, He's not uninformed." "Does God have the power necessary to change this?" "Yes, He's not powerless." If those things are true, then whatever I'm going through has come through that grid. So for reasons I may never understand, God knows this is a necessary part of my story in order for me to fulfill the purpose for which I was given life. I may never understand it. Maybe there's a need for me to get back on track because I'm off track. Maybe there's a need for me to get stronger because God knows something else is coming and I need to get stronger for that. Maybe there's someone around me and this is the way that they're going to have their eyes opened to the presence of Christ, and they need that and God's going to use me for that. But here's the deal: if those four things are true and God still allows this into my life, then I can believe by faith it's necessary for some reason. And if that's true, I'm okay with it. I don't like it, but I'm okay with it. Now some of you right now are thinking, "Wait a minute, I'm not sure I'm okay with it." (*laughter*) Okay, fine, let's think about that. What's the alternative? The alternative is there is no purpose, that life is like a lottery and you just happen to select a losing lottery ticket. "So sorry you're going through hard times." It doesn't accomplish a thing. You just got a bad ticket; that's the way it goes. To me, that would be absolutely unbearable; that would be devastating. If I know there's some reason, whether I ever understand the reason or not, if I know there is some reason why God has allowed this to be part of my story in order to fulfill His purpose in my life, I'm okay with that...I'm okay with that. I don't have to like it, but I'm still okay with that. That's what he's talking about. God always does it for our good. God always gets it right.

...so that we may share in His holiness.

Holiness is a term that means *set apart*. I prefer the definition *other than*. So, go back to our conversation about the idea that we're aliens and strangers and we're headed to the better city—the heavenly city—a city that is *other than* anything this world has to offer. Our definition of faith from chapter 11 verse 1 is that *faith is the substance of things hoped for*, meaning I believe it so strongly, it actually becomes the substance of my life today. If I believe so strongly that I'm headed to a better city and want to live as a citizen of that better city, I believe that so strongly I actually start to live that way now, which is **holiness**, which is *other than-ness* from the rest of the world and the people around me. That's what he's saying. Verse 11:

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful;

This is one we say, “Well...duh!” It's not fun. Nobody likes it. Nobody's finding joy in these moments. I think the reason he says that is because we shouldn't get the idea if we're so super spiritual and we understand it so clearly, somehow we find joy in the pain. He's saying it's not joyful; it's painful; it's sorrowful. Nobody likes it. You know again, go back to the parenting imagery. When a parent has to discipline a child, that's not fun for the parent. I don't know any parent that says, “This is awesome. I get to lay it on my kid today.” (*laughter*) Parents feel it deeply. None of us like it. As a matter of fact, that's why a lot of parents are permissive; they just don't want to deal with it. But the fact is a responsible parent deals with it, but it's sorrowful. But it's not fun for the children either. Nobody likes to be disciplined or corrected. It's **sorrowful**; it's not **joyful**.

...yet to those who have been trained by it, (which is an athletic term) afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

In other words, it's necessary in order to keep us on track to live for the right things. If you think of **righteousness** as this path of righteousness that the trailblazer has prepared for us, it's this idea that, “I need God to teach me; I need God to instruct me; I need God to correct me and discipline me to keep me on that path.” The reality is I only get one race. I only get one shot at this; there are no do-overs, so I want to go down the right path. I want to get to the finish line and know I lived for the things that matter. So what you have is a *peace* that comes from that. The peace is knowing, “I'm on the right track; I'm living for the things that matter.” Even in the most difficult moments of life, if I'm still on the right path, if I'm still living for the things that matter, I'm okay with that. I'm at peace with that. Paul writes from a prison cell, “I've learned to be content in whatever circumstances I'm in.” It's the same thing. Paul knew even if I'm in prison, if I'm in prison for the sake of the gospel, he's at peace with that. That's **the peaceful fruit of righteousness**.

So here are a couple of things as we close this up. First of all, without question there are those of you here this morning that struggle from a *father wound*, whether it was some form of abuse or neglect or in some way you could never measure up. Whatever it is for you, it's a father wound, and that father wound gets projected onto God. If you could unpack your view of God, you might be surprised at how similar your view of God is to your earthly father. And as long as that's true, you're going to struggle. You're going to struggle trusting God; you're going to struggle submitting to God, and every time God disciplines you, you're going to misunderstand it. You're going to think God's being unfair. You're going to think God's being abusive. You're going to think God's mad at you. You're going to think God's punishing you for past sins. You're just going to misinterpret it. You're going to fail to see God just wants to help. God loves you. You're His child. He just wants to help. He wants to teach you. He wants to instruct you. He wants to make you stronger. He wants to keep you on the right path to experience the fruit of righteousness.

But as long as your view of God is messed up from a father wound, you're just never going to get there and you're going to struggle. Don't just dismiss this as "no big deal". At some point you have to face it; you have to get some healing, and you have to start separating out the difference between your heavenly Father and your earthly father. As I said, we have resources that can help you with this. You just need to ask somebody on staff, and they'll get you pointed in the right direction.

Second of all, for those of us who are parents and especially those of us that are dads, you have to recognize the sobering reality of what was just said. My job as a dad is to represent God to my children. Everything I do with my children is contributing to their formulation of their view of God. It is such a serious and sobering responsibility. Every time I discipline my child, I need to be keenly aware what I'm doing in this moment is: I am representing to them that this is how God disciplines us. This is how God treats you; this is how God loves you. You see a parent grab a kid and shake him, you think, "Wait a minute; is that how God treats us? Is that really the way God is?" Discipline should be thoughtful. It should be prayerful. It's a sobering sacred thing. I'm about to show my kids that this is how God treats you. For those of us that are older dads, some of you in the room, if you were to be honest, you have to admit you biffed it. You messed up; you did a lot of damage! You can't go back and change that. But at some point, if you know that's true, part of what may begin the healing in your son or daughter is to go back and apologize. Seek their forgiveness. Let them know that you messed up. You didn't intend to hurt them, but you did, and you need to go back and make it right. That may be the beginning of some healing that would be life changing for your son or daughter. We also reach a point where as grandparents, it's like we have a second chance. I can't go back and change the past, but the story is not over. I still have a chance to represent God to my grandkids, and if you don't have grandkids, there's no shortage of kids and teenagers here who need influences in their lives to rightly represent God. It's never too late. For all of us, we have to remember that God is for us. God wants to teach us. God wants to instruct us. Sometimes God needs to correct us. Sometimes God just needs to strengthen us. God just wants to help. You can't misinterpret that and think, "Well God's mad; God's punishing me; God's never satisfied." That's not what it is. That's a messed-up view of God. But in order for you to run your race with endurance, to run like a champion all the way to the finish line, you have to understand God wants to help. He wants to teach you. He wants to instruct you. He wants to correct you. He wants to discipline you. So at the end of the race, you will know you ran like a champion for the things that ultimately matter. God just wants to help you get there because He loves you as your heavenly Daddy.

Lord, we are just reminded again that You love us. We're Your children. You teach us. You instruct us. You correct us. You discipline us because we are Your children. You're not indifferent. You're an engaged parent that loves us and wants us to run this race like a champion, to run for the things that ultimately matter. God, help us to respond rightly that we might truly run a race as champions. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Instruction and Correction

Christ is Enough

Hebrews 12:4-11

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Opening Discussion

1. It is reported that Tom Landry once said, “The job of a football coach is to get men to do what they don’t want to do in order for them to be what they’ve always wanted to be.” Discuss this statement as it relates to parenting and leadership.
2. What was your experience with your parents and how has that affected your view of God? Discuss especially how you were instructed and disciplined.

Bible Study

1. Do a quick review of Hebrews 12:1-3. If you were to read between the lines of these verses together with what we’ve learned in the rest of Hebrews, what might be the situation that the writer is addressing with these believers?
2. Read Hebrews 12:4-11. In light of your answer in the question above, what do these believers need to remember? What is the relationship between running the race well and God’s discipline or correction?
3. How can discipline be a form of instruction and what’s the difference between discipline that is for correction versus that which is punitive? Compare Romans 8:1. Is God’s discipline corrective or punitive? How does this effect how we respond to God’s correction?
4. What does God’s instruction and correction indicate according to this text? How does one’s preparation differ depending on whether you are boarding a cruise ship or a battle ship? What’s the risk of boarding a battleship having only been prepared for a ride on the love boat?
5. What are the implications of this text for our own role as parents? What are we picturing when we discipline our kids? What do we need to know and perhaps process related to our view of God and how we were parented? Why might we respond poorly to God’s

correction? What might be necessary to see more clearly what God is wanting to do in our lives?

6. Can you run the race well without God's corrective discipline? Why or why not? If, as C.S. Lewis said, God whispers in our pleasure and shouts in our pain, how can we avoid more shouting?

Application

1. What are some practical steps you can take to work through how you were parented to make sure your view of God is not skewed by your experience with your own parents?
2. List 3 key truths from this text that you need to remember when you are going through hard times. In other words, what can you remember that will encourage you when times get hard?