

THE RECOVERY OF LOST JOY - Part eight

Sunday, May 21st, 2023 - 5:30 p.m.

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REMEMBER THE FRUIT-PRODUCING POWER OF DIVINE CHASTENING

Hebrews 12:5-11 - "And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. [6] For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.' [7] 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? [8] *If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.* [9] Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? [10] For they disciplined us for a short time *as it seemed best to them*, but he disciplines us *for our good*, that we may share his holiness. [11] For the moment *all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant*, but *later* it yields the *peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*"

This passage addressed the need to remember everything spoken to us in God's Word. "***Have you forgotten the exhortation....?***"(5). We can talk about learning God's Word like it matters no more than learning geography for an exam. Remembering the Word always brings light and life where it matters most.

The plain teaching of this passage is that some of the unpleasant things that happen to us are the result of the work of God in our lives. The writer looks at these Christians and some of the trying circumstances they are going through. "***Why*** are you facing these things? Because you are the children of God!"

Then, to make the point even more strongly, he puts it in a negative form. "In fact, if you **don't** experience the chastening of God, it is proof that you are not His children at all!"

We look at God's material and physical blessing on our lives as proof that we are His children. This writer says that chastening is also proof that we are God's children. If there's no chastening, then we aren't His children. **We** may raise children without chastening them. **God** never does.

1) **GOD'S FAITH-BUILDING, PURIFYING WORK IN OUR LIVES INCREASES IN INTENSITY AFTER CONVERSION**

The principle here is that God doesn't just **finish** a work in our lives when he saves us. He **continues** to work day by day. And the primary goal of that work is to make us holy - to make us more like Jesus Christ, God the Son - **Hebrews 12:10** - "**....he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.**"

This theme is repeated throughout the Scriptures:

Philippians 1:6 - "And I am sure of this, that he who **began** a good work in you will **bring it to completion** at the day of Jesus Christ."

Romans 8:28-29 - "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called **according to his purpose**. [29] For those whom he foreknew he also predestined **to be conformed to the image of his Son**, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Now that work gets carried out in different ways. On the positive side He works in our hearts through prayer, through His word, through the encouragement of the saints, through the inner power of the life of His Spirit in our hearts.

But He also uses other means to continue His work in our lives. I can turn a deaf ear to His instruction. Stubbornness can set into my heart. Because God has a strong and infinite love for me, He will not just give up on me. He will adopt other means to work in my heart. Chastisement plays an important role here.

Revelation 3:19 - "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent."

Amos 3:2 - "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." This is striking. Notice, God doesn't punish them more specifically because He *hates* them. He punishes them - *chastises* them - because they, of all the families of the earth, are His unique possession.

2) **GOD CHASTENS US BECAUSE HE LOVES US**

Hebrews 12:6 - "For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

Now, we don't measure love by chastisement anymore. We measure love by giftings of personal pleasure and apparent blessing. But that's only a sign of our immaturity. The church in North America has taken its cue from the world around it.

Worldliness isn't primarily defined by smoking, drinking and watching bad movies. True, you'll be much better off without any of those things. But real worldliness in its essence is chiefly manifested in our wanting to have everything just the way we want it. Worldliness is making the ultimate goal in life ***pleasing ourselves*** rather than ***glorifying God through His Son, Jesus Christ.***

Our whole society has moved away from any notion of the value of discipline, correction or chastisement. Immaturity manifests itself in a hatred of chastisement.

I can vividly remember the time the four Horban boys shot a marble through fire inspector Dornbeer's car window with a sling-shot. I can remember the time we rolled one of the huge telephone cable rollers out from its moorings in the company lot out into the street in Prince George, B.C. I can remember when we took a knife on Sunday afternoon - the parsonage was joined to the church - and carved inappropriate things into the backs of the old wood pews in the sanctuary. I remember when we made the wonderful discovery that if you wore rubber gloves you could make sparks come out of the electrical outlets with a metal coat hanger. I can remember when we were pretending we were plumbers and somehow all the toilets in the church got plugged up with potatoes. I can remember when the abandoned shack in the field next door mysteriously burned to the ground one infamous Sunday afternoon when the Horban boys were supposed to be "resting" in their rooms.

Those were different days, to be sure. But my dad never once offered us a “time out.” He never once questioned if we had negative pent-up emotions or a bad self-image. The principle of **chastisement** was made very vivid in those days. I can remember when, just as if we were standing before the great white throne judgement - my father - the judge - would come up the stairs at night. He would go to my brothers’ room across the hall. I remember the sounds that would emerge as he purged them of their wickedness. And then there was the knowledge that your room was next on the list! I can remember putting comic books down the back of my pyjamas.

But here’s the more serious point to those accounts. Most of all, I can remember **hating chastisement**. And I can remember thinking there could be nothing positive or loving in the whole process. I couldn’t imagine anything good ever coming out of it.

That’s the way small minds think. That’s immaturity. But the reason the subject of divine chastisement needs to be resurrected in the church is our whole world no longer believes in any form of solid correction anymore. We conflate **love** with **tolerance**.

And slowly that mind-set has grown like a smog over the mind of the church. As long as God treats me with gentleness and offers His opinions and gives me my space, all will be well. In fact, that’s the way a loving God **should** respond to whatever we do.

But God isn't like that. He never has been. He works whatever is needed in us to take us from where we are right now and change us into what will glorify Him. I still have no foreknowledge to know all the trouble my life was spared because of what appeared to be very unpleasant times of chastisement.

3) **GOD HAS DIFFERENT WAYS OF CHASTENING US**

- a) ***Through unpleasant circumstances*** - Here's a fundamental conviction for all who believe in the kind of God revealed in the Scriptures. The purpose of all circumstances - however unpleasant - is to further our sanctification. God is so wise and so powerful and so insistent in His loving purposes, that there is absolutely nothing that is going to happen to you for the rest of your life that He can't use for your spiritual good if you'll receive it with trust in His wisdom and patience.

That doesn't mean ***bad*** things won't happen. They surely will. But even those things can't separate you from the love of God and His plan to work everything ***together*** to make you more like Christ - **Romans 8:28-29** - **“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. [29] For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”**

This isn't just a pretty slogan. It's God's plan for this real world. So God puts **obstacles** in the path of some of our corrupt dreams. He can use a cranky boss to teach me self-control. He can use a recession and financial ruin to teach me not to trust in riches. He can use a stubborn willed teenager to show me the need of prayer and time with family.

How can I learn patience without being made to wait? How can I learn humility without the teaching of some miserable failures? How can I learn heavenly mindedness without having some of the things of this world stripped from me? How else can I be encouraged to **"set my affections on things above"**?

- b) ***Sometimes we are lead through physical suffering*** - I don't suppose anybody likes to talk about it very much, but it is dealt with in the Scriptures:

Psalm 119:67,71 - "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.....It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes."

1 Corinthians 11:27-32 - "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. [28] Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. [29] For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. [30] That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. [31] But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. [32] But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world."

That certainly doesn't mean that every time a person is sick, God is chastening him. Jesus made that perfectly clear. But nothing dulls our spiritual senses like comfort, and nothing awakens them like suffering. And there are times when God will use suffering for our own good.

- c) ***Sometimes God withdraws His manifest presence from our lives*** - This happens over and over in the Scriptures:

Hosea 5:6,15 - "With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the Lord, but they will not find him; he has withdrawn from them....15...I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me."

We have all known something of that in our own experience. God hides His face. I **feel** His displeasure more keenly. We become aware of our spiritual drifting. God loves us too much to allow us to continue for too long in a spiritual coma. He works to create a hunger in our hearts - a **spiritual loneliness**.

4) **RESPONDING PROPERLY TO CHASTENING**

Take note of that word, "**responding**." Chastening is not **automatically** beneficial. There is what God **intends** in His chastening love and there is also the **human factor** in the process. My response to God's chastening must line up with trust in His righteous and faithful purposes for my experience in His discipline.

God's goal we know. We've been told in His Word - **Hebrews 12:10** - "**...he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.**" So here's what we know for sure. It's what we must hold on to while the storm of circumstance rages around us. God has **revealed** what He's up to. His **motive** is **love**. His **goal** is our **holiness**. Usually that's **all** we will know at the moment of trial.

But here's the point. The writer doesn't just talk about what **God** is doing when He chastens us. That is only part of the story. There's a type of **response** that is called for on our part.

a) ***First, there are some things we must not do:***

Hebrews 12:5-6 - "And have you *forgotten the exhortation* that addresses you as sons? 'My son, *do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.* [6] For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.'"

- i) The writer points to a passage from the only Bible these Hebrew Christians would have, the Old Testament. He points them to **Proverbs 3:11-12** - **"My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, [12] for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights."**

Whether they had totally forgotten it, or like us, were just in danger of forgetting it, he tells them that God has a word for them. He had already spoken in His Word about where they were right now in their Christian walk. And everything hinges on their taking His word to heart, rather than just looking at the difficulty they're in.

Here's the life-lesson. For God's chastening grace to be fruit-producing in my life, ***I have to look at it in God's way rather than in mine.*** If I don't see it right, everything is wasted.

Perhaps first and foremost, I must see God's goal for my whole life. What is God trying to do with my life anyway? Where is He trying to take me. What is He trying to make of me? And are we pursuing the same goals?

If I'm after peace of mind, serenity, happiness, health, and prosperity, and God is after moral purity, patience, obedience, humility, Christ-like self sacrifice for the lost, and God being glorified in everything I say and do - if our goals are **that** different, there's going to be nothing but confusion and strife all along the way.

So that's the first thing the writer says to these bruised Christians. "I know you're hurting big time. I know things are not easy for you right now. But whatever you do, don't lose sight of what's been promised about God's chastening hand. It's a word of encouragement. Never forget God's viewpoint! Hold it before your mind constantly. Let it frame your thinking"

- ii) Next, the writer says, “....**do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord....**”(5). Let's consider what he means here. The opposite of "**making light**" of the Lord's discipline is "**weighing it**" - not treating it as though it were nothing more than just circumstances flowing randomly through your life - like having a **bad day**.

Even if you aren't sure weather the season you're facing is somehow **God's** doing or just a random mess the **attitude you must summon is the same**. We are to **ponder what God might be doing with our lives**. We are to be giving due thought to what we know are the revealed **divine goals** for God's children in this world.

The Christian must constantly guard against an ***impersonal view of life*** - the idea that things just happen randomly for us - that the best we can do is steel ourselves against the trials of life and brush them off and move on. The writer of this letter says, "Don't brush off what might be the Lord wanting to sanctify, and grow fruit for the long run in your life!"

- iii) Finally, he says we are not to “....**be weary when reproved by him**”(5). Notice how he expands on this so powerfully in the following verses -**Hebrews 12:11-12** - **"For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. [12] Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees...."**

In case you've forgotten, this is a series about ***spiritual weariness***. And the writer specifically says that we are staring a particular source of weariness right in the face. In fact, it's interesting that these verses on divine chastening come right on the heels of some of the best loved and most quoted verses in the entire Bible:

Hebrews 12:1-2 - "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] 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."

Look at those words in **Hebrews 12:11** - **"For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."**

That word **"trained"** or **"exercised"** (KJV) comes from the greek word **"gumnazo."** It's where we get our English word, ***gymnasium***. And that sums it up completely. God has a gym membership for you. And you'll get quite a work-out at times.

But there's reason for it that is deeply profound. Most of our gym work-outs are rooted in little more than *vanity*. God's gym is different. And it ties in with the picture painted in **Hebrews 12:1-2** - **“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] 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.”**

There it is. It's all about the running of a race. And it's all about winning an eternal prize. And it all matters. Which means God's going to push us all, at different times, and discipline us in *love*. But it's with a high purpose. Never allow yourself to lose sight of the finish line.