



# God's Discipline

Hebrews 12:4-11

## Bearing Fruit

- ❑ Jesus says, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit,<sup>1</sup> while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.” (*John 15:1-2, NIV*)
- ❑ God the Father “prunes” (trims clean)<sup>2</sup> undesirable branches in our lives to divert energy into the production of quality fruit. These undesirable branches may be particular perspectives, values, attitudes, behaviors, etc. that need to be cleaned out so we can become more fruitful.
  1. How does God “prune” believers? What does God *use* to prune us?<sup>3</sup>

- ❑ Pruning is part of the gardener’s “training” of the plant. We are trained by God’s pruning. Another image of training is a father’s discipline of his son or daughter.

📖 “Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.” (*Deuteronomy 8:5, NIV*)



## The Father's Discipline

- ❑ After talking about believers who persevered in the faith despite severe persecution and mistreatment (*Hebrews 11:35-37*), the writer to the Hebrews points us to the greatest example of perseverance. Though he did nothing wrong, Jesus Christ was tortured, mocked, whipped, imprisoned, and killed on a cross.<sup>4</sup>
  - 📖 *The writer says*, “let us run with perseverance<sup>5</sup> the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross... Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (*Hebrews 12:1b-3, NIV*)
- ❑ Whatever struggles we face, we need to remember that Jesus endured worse. He persevered and emerged victorious. If we are “in him” through faith, we will share in his final victory.

<sup>1</sup> This phrase probably refers to those who associate with Christ but are not true believers. The true vine cannot be unfruitful or bear bad fruit, so any true branch (true believer) will bear some fruit. Some argue that ‘in me’ implies a loss of salvation, but that may push the metaphor too far. Judas Iscariot may be an example of a cut-off branch.

<sup>2</sup> ‘prune’ (*kathairō* – trim clean) – to trim the branches of the plant to make it more healthy, productive and fruitful. The goal is a better quality of fruit, not necessarily a greater quantity of fruit.

<sup>3</sup> It’s often said that God’s ‘pruning tool’ is His Word. ‘For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart’ (*Hebrews 4:12, NIV*). Jesus told his disciples, ‘You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you’ (*John 15:3*). God’s written Word (the Bible) is ‘useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness’ (*2 Timothy 3:16-17*). The Holy Spirit applies God’s Word through various means, including personal study, teaching, preaching, other people, failure, difficulty, trials, trouble and suffering. As the psalmist wrote, ‘It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees’ (*Psalms 119:71, NIV*).

<sup>4</sup> Though Jesus Christ committed no sin, he died for *our* sin, ‘for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (*Romans 3:23*) and ‘the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (*6:23*). ‘For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God’ (*1 Peter 3:18, NIV84*).

<sup>5</sup> ‘perseverance’ (*hypomonēs*) – endurance, steadfastness. Endurance is needed to ‘run the race’ of the Christian life and reach the goal of complete spiritual maturity (Christ-likeness). The power to endure is “in Christ.”

- Then the writer shifts to the perspective of God’s discipline. Read Hebrews 12:4-11.
2. The writer considers hardship to be God’s discipline, and reminds his readers of “that word of encouragement” (12:5-6; *quotation of Proverbs 3:11-12*). Why is it a “word of encouragement?” How does it help us face trials and suffering? (12:7-8)<sup>6</sup>
  3. Why should we consider hardship to be God’s discipline? (This passage does not clearly say.) Should we consider all the troubles we face to be part of God’s discipline? Explain.<sup>7</sup>
  4. The writer uses the example of human fathers to make his point. Of course, not everyone has a positive view of the discipline received from their human fathers. How is God’s discipline different? (12:9-10a)<sup>8</sup>
  5. Discipline is painful, but it results in good if we respond in the right way.<sup>9</sup> What good results from God’s discipline? (12:10b-11)<sup>10</sup> How does it happen? What have you experienced or observed?



## The Fruit of Trials and Suffering

- The Bible consistently talks about the benefits of trials and suffering. For example, read James 1:2-4, Romans 5:2-4, and 1 Peter 1:6-7. The first two passages say trials and suffering produce perseverance (endurance), resulting in spiritual maturity (Christ-like character) – a process eventually completed when Christ returns. This is similar to Hebrews 12:10-11.

### Reflection/Application

- Are you experiencing difficulties, trouble, or suffering? If you aren’t now, you will in the future. How will you handle it? What are you trusting in? The Bible says, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (*Psalms 46:1*). Do you need to trust in Christ?
- As a believer, how do you respond to the trials in your life? Do you view them as your Father’s loving discipline? Pray for God’s strength to endure. Don’t focus on your troubles. Focus on Jesus, and submit to God’s purpose to complete the good work begun in you.

<sup>6</sup> Hardship is viewed as God’s discipline, and God’s discipline is evidence of his love and care, for ‘he who loves [his son] is diligent to discipline him’ (Proverbs 13:24). The true child of God should expect his discipline, and be encouraged to respond to his discipline with positive action and perseverance.

<sup>7</sup> God is sovereign, all-knowing and all-powerful, so the hardships we face are either sent by God or allowed by God. As God’s children, we expect God to constantly watch over us and care for us. He is always a loving Father. Whether or not we call it ‘God’s discipline,’ we should know that He is in control and ‘that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose’ (Romans 8:28, NIV).

<sup>8</sup> Most of us respect our fathers, but they are not perfect. They disciplined us ‘as they thought best’ (12:10), but they may have failed at times. In some cases, their disciplinary actions may have caused harm. However, God is perfect, and his discipline is truly for our good (12:10). Thus, how much more should we submit to God’s discipline (12:9).

<sup>9</sup> As D.A. Carson says, ‘Pain tends to make people better, or bitter’ (D.A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering & Evil* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990], 121).

<sup>10</sup> God’s holiness, righteousness and peace are not fully realized until Christ returns to establish his Kingdom. God’s discipline trains us to persevere to the end ‘that we may share in his holiness.’ We also experience the ‘fruit’ of God’s discipline in our present lives (the word translated ‘harvest’ is *karpon* – fruit). God’s discipline trains us to live holy lives, reflecting God’s righteousness and peace, and bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).