

**LESSON TWENTY-THREE**  
**HEBREWS 12:1-13**

**DAY ONE**

1. Looking back to Hebrews 11, who are the great cloud of witnesses and what was the quality of their testimony?
2. Who do you look to in your life for encouragement to persevere in your faith? Do you think that others would describe you as an example of one who continues on in faith?
3. The main verb of Heb. 12:1 is “let us run the race.” What are the two primary actions one needs to take in order to run the race of faith well?
4. The word for encumbrance has the idea of excess weight, or things that weigh us down, not necessarily sin. Are there things in your life that may not be overtly sinful, but that slow you down in your Christian walk?
5. We are also to lay aside the sins that entangle us. Take the opportunity to ask God to search your heart and reveal to you any sins that might be entangling you. As he does this, confess these things to God and ask for His enabling power to “lay aside” these things.
6. How does the metaphor of a running a race better enable you to understand the Christian walk/run?

7. In Heb. 12:2, we are called to look to Jesus and what He endured as a source of encouragement. How does Jesus' life/death/exaltation encourage you?

## **DAY TWO**

### **Read Hebrews 2:10.**

8. The term "author" is better translated as "pioneer" or "leader." How does this description of Jesus encourage you?

9. Jesus is also described as the perfecter of faith. Knowing that He also went through a process of perfection (or completion), how are you encouraged?

10. In Heb. 12:2-3, what did Jesus endure? What did He experience as a result of His endurance?

### **Read Luke 9:51.**

11. The Greek word translated as "ascension" is literally "to be taken up." What was Jesus' focus as He made the decision to submit to the suffering that would lie ahead for him? How does it make you feel to know that Jesus so determinedly made the decision to endure intense pain in order for us to be brought near to the Father?

12. If the Christian walk is a race, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, where are you on this journey?

13. Have you ever felt weary and discouraged in your Christian walk? If so, how have you dealt with your discouragement?

**DAY THREE**

**Read Hebrews 12:4-8.**

14. What is your initial reaction to this passage?

15. The Greek word which is translated “discipline” is better translated “instruction,” “training,” or “correction.” It does not convey the sense of punishment. Read the passage again with this in mind. Does it change the way you understand it?

**Read Proverbs 3:11-12 (from the Old Testament).**

16. Hebrews 12:5-6 quotes the Greek version of Proverbs 3:11-12. What is the primary difference between the version in Hebrews and the version in the Old Testament?

17. In these passages, what is God’s attitude toward His sons and daughters?

**Read Luke 3:22.**

18. What is God the Father’s response toward His Son?

19. How does it make you feel to think that God responds to you the same way as He does to His Son?

**DAY FOUR**

**Read Hebrews 12:9-11.**

20. In this passage, how is the discipline of the earthly father described?

21. How is the discipline of God the Father described?

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:28.**

22. What is the result of Jesus subjecting Himself to the Father? Why is He so easily able to submit Himself to the Father?

**Read Ephesians 6:4.**

22. How are fathers supposed to treat their children?

23. In your family of origin, how was discipline administered? Did you respect your parents' discipline? Why or why not? Do you think this effects the way in which you relate to God as a Father?

24. If you are a parent, how do you discipline your children? Do you think it reflects the way that God deals with us? Why or why not?

**DAY FIVE**

25. The literal translation for “earthly fathers” is “fathers of our flesh.” This is contrasted with God as the Father of spirits? What nuance do you think this brings out in the way that God trains and instructs us versus the way in which our parents do?

26. Does this passage say that God brings difficult circumstances into our lives in order to punish us? Explain your answer.

27. How do you reconcile that God allows painful situations to enter into our lives in order that He might train and instruct us with the fact that we are His children and we know God to be a loving Father?

28. According to Heb. 12:11, what are the benefits of our sorrow? Is this comforting to you or not?

29. Have you had the experience of God training you in the midst of your difficult circumstances? Have you experienced the yield of “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” as God has entered into your pain? Can you describe it?

**Read Hebrews 12:12-13 and Proverbs 3:1-8.**

30. What is the promised result of making your paths straight?

31. What can you do to strengthen yourself and make straight paths in your life?

**LESSON TWENTY-THREE SCRIPTURE**

**Hebrews 12:1-13** <sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. <sup>4</sup> You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; <sup>5</sup> 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; <sup>6</sup> FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." <sup>7</sup> It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup> But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup> Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected

them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, <sup>13</sup> and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

## LESSON TWENTY-THREE SCRIPTURE

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**Hebrews 12:1-13** <sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

### DAY TWO

**Hebrews 2:10** For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

**Luke 9:51** And it came about, when the days were approaching for His ascension, that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem;

### DAY THREE

**Hebrews 12:4-8** <sup>4</sup> You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; <sup>5</sup> 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; <sup>6</sup> FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." <sup>7</sup> It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup> But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

#### **Proverbs 3:11-12 (Hebrew translation as it appears in the Old Testament)**

<sup>11</sup> My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD Or loathe His reproof, <sup>12</sup> For whom the LORD loves He reproofs, Even as a father *corrects* the son in whom he delights.

**Luke 3:21-22** <sup>21</sup> Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

## DAY FOUR

**Hebrews 12:9-11** <sup>9</sup> Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

**1 Corinthians 15:28** When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

**Ephesians 6:4** <sup>4</sup> Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

## DAY FIVE

**Hebrews 12:12-13** <sup>12</sup> Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, <sup>13</sup> and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

**Proverbs 3:1-8** <sup>1</sup>My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; <sup>2</sup> For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you. <sup>3</sup> Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. <sup>4</sup> So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man. <sup>5</sup> Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. <sup>6</sup> In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. <sup>7</sup> Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. <sup>8</sup> It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones.

## LESSON TWENTY-THREE COMMENTARY

Chapter Eleven of Hebrews provided a catalog of witnesses for us to emulate. Men and women from the Old Testament demonstrated their ability to believe, to exercise faith in the midst of hardship, the threat of death, and in light of the fact that many of them did not receive in their lifetime what had been promised to them by God. Heb. 11:39-40 tells us that apart from us, they were not made perfect. The author of Hebrews has made his argument that New Testament believers live in an era that is far superior to anything experienced by those who lived during Old Testament times. The angels, the covenants to Moses and to Abraham, the priesthood, the sacrificial system, all of these could do but one thing: point to the Son who would bring all things to completion as the result of His sacrifice on the cross and His subsequent exaltation to the right hand of the Father. This one event has made it possible for those who lived before Christ and those who lived after, to experience perfection and to obtain direct access to God the Father. In the opening statement to Hebrews Chapter Twelve, the author adjures his readers to focus on the witness of the Old Testament believers and the example of Christ in order to nurture our faith and endure in the Christian walk. Our Old Testament comrades, although not living perfect lives, exhibited a faith that qualified them to be characterized as “accepting or pleasing to God.” We are to look at their lives and find the strength that we need to continue forward. Our greatest example however is the Son Jesus, who endured not only hardship, but extreme pain and suffering as He willingly received punishment for our sin. We are encouraged to look at Jesus’ life and the determined attitude He exhibited because He was convinced of the goal: our salvation. Jesus looked ahead to the prize that lay before Him, and this was His motivation to submit to a mental, physical, and emotional pain that is unimaginable. Jesus was separated from His Father in order that we might have direct access to the Father. Jesus died in order that we might inherit eternal life. Jesus was punished for our sin in order that we might be cleansed from all sin. Our author encourages His readers, and us alike, to keep our focus on the supreme example of Jesus and to keep our sight trained on the goal, which ultimately will be our own exaltation into glory.

Hebrews 12:1-13, can be divided into four primary sections. In 12:1-3 the author presents Jesus as our source of encouragement to persevere. Following Hebrews Chapter Eleven, we see that faith involves an ability to persist to the end. This is where our readers are struggling and the author seeks to provide a different perspective through which they need to interpret their circumstances. In 12:4-8 the author makes that point that we are sons and daughters of God, and that part of this relationship involves parental instruction that trains our character. We are not promised a carefree life. Rather if we are to be conformed to Christ, it will involve every part of His life, including suffering. Even suffering is a means through which God enables us to draw near to Him and to become more like His Son. In 12:9-11 the loving discipline of God the Father is contrasted with the imperfect discipline of our earthly parents. The result of Godly discipline is the reward of peace and righteousness. In 12:12-13, the author acknowledges the wearied state of his audience and encourages them to exert the strength that He knows they possess that will enable them to stand firm in their faith.

## Hebrews 12:1-3

Hebrews 12:1-3 introduces the metaphor of a race. The author depicts the Christian walk as one that has a beginning point, a middle point and a completion point. He views his readers as nearing the end of the race. We have seen that they have already demonstrated the ability to withstand suffering, they have already proven their faith, and yet they are at a point where some are growing weary, some have fallen away, and some are shrinking back. In light of this, the author pushes his audience to endure. He speaks to them as a coach at half-time providing a motivational talk and giving them a strategy to win the game. The difference between our author and a coach however, is that the coach can never be sure of the outcome. Our author knows with the utmost of certainty that his readers will obtain an eternal inheritance of life with God as their prize. The main verb in Heb. 12:1, and thus the main point of this passage is the author's exhortation "let us run with endurance." Looking to the cloud of witnesses who surround us, laying aside encumbrances and the entanglements of sin, and fixing our eyes on Jesus, are all parallel thoughts that detail the strategy for running the race successfully. In Heb. 10:23-25, we are exhorted to remain in community with other believers so that we can find encouragement and stimulation to continue moving forward. Not only do fellow believers provide the inspiration we need, we also have the example of those Old Testament figures who walked before us. In light of their faithfulness and in light of the fact that we have received God's promise in Christ, we are even better equipped to run with staying power. The Old Testament witnesses are described as a cloud surrounding us. They encourage us through their testimonies. They are not spectators watching us rather we are to look to them, emulate their faith and belief in God, and to join with them in pressing on toward the goal.

In addition to looking to our faith community, both past and present, we are also told to "lay aside every encumbrance" and "to throw off the entanglements of sin." The first admonition to lay aside every encumbrance is better understood as taking off anything that is in excess. In an athletic competition, the athletes wear as little as possible, some even shaving the hair off of their body in order to have every possible competitive advantage. The parallel for us is not that we have to shave or lose weight, but that we need to examine our lives and ask God if our endeavors, our activities, and the ways in which we spend our time are helping us or hindering us in running this race. This is not to say that if we have not devoted ourselves to missionary work, chosen voluntary poverty for the sake of the kingdom, or become engaged in full-time ministry that we have chosen a life that is holding us back. Regardless of our occupation or our stage in life, we may have things in our lives that weigh us down. These "weights" might even be things that are good for us, but if they become a distraction or in some way hinder us, they will keep us from experiencing God's best. If there are impediments in your life, it is between you and God to sort it out. His desire is for you to live life to the fullest, which means deriving our pleasure and our joy from Him.

The second admonition is to lay aside the sins that entangle us. Here the author does focus on specific behaviors or attitudes that are sinful and interfere with our ability to draw close to God and run unencumbered. In the book of Hebrews, the word for sin has been used specifically to refer to rebellion. Heb. 3:13 says, "But encourage one

another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Although our author has spent considerable time explaining that Christ's death on the cross as the final atoning sacrifice for mankind has taken care of the issue of all sin for all time, we have not yet been liberated from the day-to-day sins that lure us away from our Father. When Christ died on the cross, He proclaimed that all those who accept His sacrifice are sanctified. We are proclaimed holy and righteous. When we accept Him, this is our standing. This becomes our identity. Every time God looks at us, He sees what His Son has done on our behalf. God's view of us is that we are perfect. We live in a period of time that has been called "the already and the not yet." We already possess the cleansing benefits of Christ's death on the cross. We do not yet, possess the inheritance though. We are still in the flesh, we still battle with sin, but as Paul says, "sin is no longer our master." It is because of what Christ has done that we can throw off the entanglements of sin. Our author calls us to realize the gravity of sin as something that if left unchecked can deceive us and result in a heart that is hardened towards God. Our author is also very matter of fact that all we need to do is throw off the entanglement. He does not condemn his audience for being entangled in sin. Instead he encourages them to deal with it. We acknowledge our sin, we confess it to God, and we seek the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the particular areas of sin in our lives. It sounds simple, but it may be very painful to allow God entrance into the darkest parts of our being. We have the assurance though, that He will do this in love, not in condemnation, not to shame us, but because He wants a relationship with us that has no obstacles. Until we leave this earth, we will continue to struggle with sin, but we are forgiven, we are loved, and we are precious children with a perfect Father.

The supreme example to whom we are to focus our attention is Jesus. Heb. 12:2-3 emphasizes the suffering and the pain that Christ endured in His earthly life. Jesus is described as the leader or the pioneer of our faith (we encountered this title earlier in Heb. 2:10) and the perfecter of our faith, or the one who brings our faith to its complete expression.<sup>1</sup> What Jesus accomplished was done so because of His intense focus on His Father. All throughout the gospels, Jesus consistently tells his followers that He only does what the Father tells Him to do, that He and the Father are one, and that His intention is to explain the Father to us. The relationship that Jesus had with His Father, coupled with the end goal of salvation for all those who would believe in Him, was what Jesus chose to focus upon in His life on earth. He endured horrific suffering at the cross, a suffering far worse than any we could ever imagine as He was separated from His Father. F. F. Bruce writes, "To die by crucifixion was to plumb the lowest depths of disgrace; it was a punishment reserved for those who were deemed most unfit to live, a punishment for those who were subhuman. From so degrading a death Roman citizens were exempt by ancient statute; the dignity of the Roman name would be besmirched by being brought into association with anything as vile as the cross. For slaves, and criminals of low degree, it was regarded as a suitable means of execution, and a grim deterrent to others."<sup>2</sup> Jesus willingly submitted to the shame of the cross and as a result He is the perfecter of our faith. Heb 12:2 says that for the joy set before

<sup>1</sup> William Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 47b, *Hebrews*, 411.

<sup>2</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 338.

Jesus, he endured the cross. A better translation is that Jesus exchanged the joy that belonged to Him as the Son of God, for a path of suffering. When He sat down at the right hand of the Father however, His work was complete. The Greek tense of this phrase “he sat down” describes a past completed action and stands in stark contrast to the prior description of Jesus’ suffering. The act of sitting at the Father’s right hand shows that He accomplished the intended goal of obtaining our salvation. Heb. 5:9 says, “And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.” In Heb. 12:3, the audience is encouraged once again to consider closely the one who not only has experienced intense suffering but has had this experience at the hand of sinners. Rom. 5:8 says that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. At the very moment when the sinfulness of mankind was expressing its greatest hostility toward Jesus, He was expressing His greatest act of kindness and love toward mankind.

When we look to Jesus, we see a man who remains anchored in His relationship with His Father. We see a man who is willing to give up His rights, to endure intense pain, for the sake of others. We see a man who remained staunchly committed to His goal. We see a man who persevered and received a magnificent reward at the end of His journey. The author of Hebrews commands his readers to look to Jesus’ example to find the strength they need to continue on in their faith. They are at the brink of becoming discouraged and losing heart (literally to be sick in one’s inmost being). This recalls the words of Joshua to the Israelites as they were presented with the opportunity to inherit the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." Our intended goal lies ahead of us. There may be hardship, loss, or suffering that stands between us and the goal, but once again we are encouraged to look toward the One who not only endured far greater hostility and pain than we will ever experience. He is able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses though, and not only are we given the privilege of identifying with Him in His suffering, He also identifies with us and treats us with love and compassion.

### **Hebrews 12:4-8**

This section of Hebrews introduces the theme of a parent/child relationship and divine discipline. The word “discipline” conjures up negative associations, but the Greek word really entails the idea of training, instruction, or correction. In keeping with the theme of an athletic race, training is an integral component. The author presents God the Father as a loving parent who instructs and corrects His children so that they will make the right choices, but more importantly so that they will know God the Father as a parent. We learned in Heb. 2:11 that both He who sanctifies (Jesus) and those who are sanctified (us) are all from one Father and Jesus is not ashamed to call us His brothers and sisters. It is absolutely essential that we understand this passage in light of the fact that God is a good and perfect Father and that through Jesus we are invited into a relationship with God in which we are loved, accepted, and treated with the same quality of affection that He lavishes upon His Son. It may be very difficult for some of us to read this passage without viewing God as a punishing disciplinarian who delights in

doling out pain to His children. Whether it is our intention or not, it can be very hard to separate our earthly experience of discipline (coming from any kind of parental source) from that which God dispenses. Many of us have suffered the ill-effects of discipline improperly administered. It may have been entirely lacking in our growing up years, it may have been abusive, or it may have been inconsistent. At best, with a wise and loving parent, discipline will be imperfect, and our author acknowledges this. What our author seeks to do is to provide a new perspective on suffering. He has already chronicled the difficulties that Israel has had in accepting challenging situations from God the Father. When God led the Israelites out of Egypt, they quickly took for granted His sustaining gifts, and wanted to go back to the oppression and relative safety of Egypt. They may have been abused under the Egyptian powers, but they knew what to expect. With God, many of the Israelites were unable to trust in His goodness toward them when life circumstances were different from what they expected. Because the author observes that this attitude of unbelief is cropping up among his readers, he strongly implores them to view their life situation as one in which they have a loving Father who is more loving and caring than any earthly parent could be. When we look to the example of God the Father's relationship with His Son, we know that we have a Savior who endured the cross in order that we might have life and we have a Father who delights in what His Son has done. God is not unaware of our pain, and although much of what we experience in this life comes from the hand of sinful, damaged humanity, God cares about our pain. The only possible way to deal with our hurt is to view it in light of God's fatherly compassion.

Heb. 12:4 begins with the statement "you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood." Although this may sound as if the readers are being chastised for this, the opposite is true. The author encourages them by the truth that they have not been asked to undergo anything nearly as painful as what Jesus endured, but whatever does occur in their lives, they have a Savior who clearly understands what it means to suffer. The author then calls to mind a portion of Proverbs (Prov. 3:11-12) which introduces the idea of family relationship and the discipline or instruction that is a necessary part of this relationship. The book of Proverbs is essentially a father's wisdom being passed down to his son. Throughout the book of Proverbs, two ways of life are described: the life of wisdom that leads to peace and righteousness and the life of folly that leads to destruction. All of the wisdom offered in this book is designed to persuade the son to choose the way of wisdom. This particular passage of Proverbs is firmly embedded in a speech that the father is making to his son regarding the supreme qualities of wisdom. The father encourages his son to not forget his teaching, to write kindness and truth on the tablet of his heart, to lean on God instead of his own wisdom, and in so doing to reap the reward of long life, pleasant days, and paths of peace. Embedded in this context, the father tells his son not to think lightly of the discipline (or instruction/training) of the Lord and to not give up under His reproof. The reason for this is that God corrects the one He loves, the one in whom He delights. The author of Hebrews draws from the Greek text of the Old Testament, which reads, "for whom the Lord loves, he rebukes, and scourges every son whom he receives." The Hebrew version of Prov. 3:12 has a different nuance. It reads, "For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son *in whom* he delights." The main point of the quotation from Proverbs is

not that the child is disciplined, but that the child is loved by the father. Correction and training is borne out of love and sheer delight. The father wants the child to reach the finish line and to run the race well. He wants the child to act with wisdom and thus be spared from the painful consequences of folly. Which of us as parents do not desire the same for our children? We train our own children to seek God, to make good decisions, to apply wisdom to their lives. We want them to live lives of peace and joy. When it becomes necessary to discipline them, we do so with the hope that they will avoid repeating the foolish behavior. It is out of our love for them, out of our desire for the very best for their lives that we instruct, correct, and discipline them. We may not always perfectly reflect the character of God in this aspect, but as believers our goal should be to strive to so reflect the beauty of God's character that it makes it easy for others to relate to Him. We want the people in our lives to be able to look at us and say, "I could trust in a God who treated me like my mom/friend/sister/daughter does."

Hebrews 12:6 says that whom the father disciplines the son, but that he also "receives" the son. The Greek word for "receives" has the nuance of "welcome" or "accept," which calls to mind God the Father's proclamation over Jesus at His baptism. The words of the Father to the Son are, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased, (Lk. 3:22)." In this verse, we learn that the Father is delighted in His Son. Throughout Jesus' ministry we see His utter dependence upon His Father and that He does everything with the sole intention of bringing glory to His Father and not to Himself. The amazing truth about the Christian faith is that when we accept Christ's sacrifice, we are invited to participate in the same quality of relationship with God the Father that He shares with His Son Jesus. We are now part of the family. We are so identified with Christ that when God the Father looks at us, He sees His beloved Son and His response toward us is one of sheer delight.

Hebrews 12:7-8 continues with the theme of discipline/instruction. Rather than being a punishment or a judgment from God, it is actually proof that we belong to God. An important distinction needs to be made between judgment and discipline/instruction. In Heb. 10:27 we read that a terrifying judgment awaits God's adversaries. We however, are part of God's family and we do not fall under this judgment. The way that God treats us is the same way He treated His Son. Hardship, pain, suffering, and rejection, all came into Jesus' life. Through these experiences, Jesus chose to identify with God the Father. He chose to bring His pain to God, and He cooperated with God the Father in allowing His circumstances to move Him toward His intended goal. It is absolutely critical to understand discipline in the sense of training and instruction. We cannot read our twenty-first century understanding of the word into the text of Hebrews or we will walk away with a skewed picture of God. The point of this passage is that because God loves us as children, He uses the painful circumstances of our lives to train us, to instruct us, and to conform us to the character of His Son. Paul writes in Romans 5:3-5, "we exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance, and perseverance proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." God does not bring difficult circumstances, illness, or conflict into our lives because we have done something

wrong. Rather, as the perfect parent He allows us to experience difficulties and He allows us to feel the consequences of our choices. He uses every situation though as an opportunity to experience His grace, to grow in our character, and to ultimately move us one step closer to Him. There are times when we need comforting words and there are times when we need to be confronted regarding our choices and our belief systems. Throughout Hebrews, we have learned that we are in the process of being made perfect. It is a rare person who possesses the self-discipline and motivation to run this race without a coach, without training, and without fellow runners.

### **Hebrews 12:9-11**

Heb. 12:4-8 made the point that although instruction and correction may be difficult, it is proof that God cares about us. He is a Father who wants to see us run the race well, and He will do what is necessary to enable us to lay aside our distractions and the entanglements of sin. The focus of the chapter shifts in Heb. 12:9-11. To further explore the idea of God's parental instruction. The author compares the discipline of an earthly parent to that of God the Father. There are two ways in which we need to be careful with this comparison. First, this passage does not say that because of the parental relationship, that all discipline coming from an earthly parent is godly. The way in which God parents His children is perfect, it is motivated by His compassionate, loyal love, and it is always for the purpose of training in righteousness. The way in which earthly parents treat their children is a dim reflection of the reality of God. Second, the comparison is from the lesser form of instruction to the greater form of instruction. Throughout Hebrews we have seen the author argue from the lesser form to the greater form with phrases like, "how much better." He does the same with this example. Generally, most people can understand the idea of positive parental discipline. How far superior is the parental discipline of God.

There are several ways in which our human experience of parental instruction is contrasted with the way in which God the Father treats us. In v. 9, the author contrasts our earthly fathers (literally "fathers of our flesh") with the Father of spirits. This is the only occurrence of the phrase "Father of spirits" in all of the New Testament. The point the author is trying to make in this contrast is that our parents are earthly, their perspective is earthly and their discipline is to train us in the earthly realm. God's discipline takes into account our entire being, flesh and spirit. He is far more qualified to know what is good for us, to know what our ultimate goal is, and to provide the instruction that will enable us to attain what He has for us. His perspective is eternal, and because He knows us so intimately, His discipline is not something that we should fear. If we do respond to God in fear, it is worth trying to sort out where that fear originates. In this passage, we are encouraged to be confident in God's character. He is not arbitrary. His instruction may be difficult, but it is never intended to scare us or to punish us. The author assumes the same from the earthly father. He writes that the natural response of a child to a father is that of respect. This term for respect can also be translated "to submit" or "be subject to." In the book of Ephesians, believers are commanded to mutually submit to one another. Husbands and wives are commanded to submit to one another, and in 1 Corinthians 15:28, Jesus is set forth as the supreme

example of submitting to God the Father. This idea of submitting to the instruction and discipline of God is made so much easier when we understand it in the context of His compassionate love toward us and His compassionate love toward His Son. Heb. 12:10 says that “the fathers of our flesh” discipline us for a short time, but the Father of spirits disciplines us in preparation for the eternal. The instruction we receive from our earthly parents is temporary; the instruction we receive from God the Father is permanent and has permanent effects in our lives. Our earthly parents discipline us according to what seems best to them. God the Father disciplines us for what He knows to be best for us. We are told that the purpose of our discipline is that we share in His holiness. This thought is too incredible for words. The Father wants to bestow upon us perfection and He is in the process of training us to receive this gift. When we accept Christ’s sacrifice, we are made perfect, or to put it another way, we are positionally holy. What this means is that from God’s perspective, we are righteous, we are holy, we are sanctified, and we are right with Him from the moment we believe in Him. Practically however, we still have to live out our lives on this earth, in a fallen world and in a fallen state. We will inherit the fullness of what God has already proclaimed us to be, but until we do God is actively involved in our earthly lives training us to be men and women who desire to walk in His ways and to be with Him.

In Heb. 12:11, the author acknowledges that this process does not necessarily appear to be joyful. He does not say that there is no joy in the process of being instructed by God. What he says is that it may not have the appearance of joy. How often have we faced difficult circumstances with uncertainty and trepidation and yet at the end of it we have seen the sustaining hand of God in our lives? Like the athlete who endures discomfort, even injuries, in order to grow and mature in his or her sport, or like the child who has to go through the discipline of learning to read and write, in our Christian life we experience the joy and the freedom that comes from submitting to the discipline. An earthly parent may train his child to be wise, to be successful, to be a good and godly person, but at some point he or she has to turn the spiritual life of his child over to the care of God who cares infinitely more than any parent ever has or ever will. The earthly parent can point the child in the right direction, but it is only God who can train us in holiness. In submitting to His instruction comes the peaceful fruit of righteousness. As a child, I was a competitive figure skater. I went to the ice rink everyday after school and on Saturday mornings. I put in countless hours of practice just to compete two or three times a year. Every new spin, jump, and move that I learned usually required hundreds of falls before it became effortless. I endured pain, discomfort, endless repetition, and times of frustration. At the end of it though, I had a beautiful spin, a jump that I could accomplish with ease, and the joy of feeling my body move in the ways that it had been trained. This sense of freedom that lies at the end of discipline is what God wants for His children. The pain and the hardship of life will only be worth it if we are able to filter it through His love and care for us. God uses all of our experiences to mold us into the people He wants us to be on earth, and to prepare us for the perfection that is to come. The peaceful fruit of righteousness is something that we can partially live in the present, and fully enjoy in the future. If we are able to trust that God is at work caring for us, growing us, and loving us, despite our circumstances we will be able to respond with graciousness. As we partake in His instructive discipline

in the present, we also partake of the holiness that He shares with His children. What is promised to the believer is the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Just as Jesus exchanged his joy for the sorrowful, suffering of the cross, we may also experience momentary sorrow. For those who submit to it, allow themselves to be trained by it, there is a reward at the end. A calm satisfaction that we stand in the presence of God the Father, accepted by Him, loved by Him, and fully enjoying His delight in us.

### **Hebrews 12:12-13**

In this passage, the author uses the image of physical health to instruct his readers to pay attention to their state of being. He acknowledges with these verses that his readers are in a particularly delicate state. They are on the verge of discouragement. They have experienced past hardship and they have been tempted to return to the relative safety of the sacrificial system. In this state of discouragement our author knows how important it is for all of us to make wise choices and not succumb to fear and doubt. The readers are never chastised for being weak. Instead they are exhorted to strengthen themselves and to strengthen one another. They are told to strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble. In order for the readers to continue forward in their journey, they need first to be aware of their weak areas and then they need to focus their attention on strengthening those areas. In a sense the command to throw off the excess weight and the entanglements of sin from Heb. 12:1 is repeated in this concluding thought. It is a reminder to pay attention to the condition of our hearts and the path that we are on in our lives. When the author tells his readers to make straight paths for their feet we again are reminded of the themes of Proverbs. Although there are numerous ethical admonitions throughout the book of Proverbs, the primary theme is to watch over one's heart. In a similar manner, the author of Hebrews challenges his audience to pay attention to their internal environment. The new covenant is now written on our hearts. It is God's word and God's Spirit that challenge us regarding the desires and the affections of our hearts. Our author knows that if the heart is left unchecked, it can fall sway to the deception of sin and ultimately to unbelief. It is for this reason that he encourages his audience to submit themselves to the loving care of God as their Father.