

If you've ever been involved in athletics, you know that you can end up in a love/hate relationship with your coach. Why? Because they generally make you do things you don't feel like doing, especially when it comes to things like conditioning. They put you through something unpleasant for the purpose of making you stronger. That's discipline.

Today you heard something potentially shocking. The letter to the Hebrews says to you, "God allows you to suffer because he loves you." What do think about that? The Bible claims that when suffering enters the lives of believers, God is demonstrating his love, because He is strengthening them in their faith. Back in my basketball days—a long time ago at this point—running killers again and again felt like punishment while we were doing it, but when it came time for the game, we were stronger. We had more endurance. When God allows his people to endure hardships, it is not to punish us. He does it to begin and continue in us a process of change.

But it's sometimes hard to believe when the one giving the discipline says, "This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you." How can you be sure your suffering is not caused by God's anger?

The letter to the Hebrews says: "...do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." ⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons."

We are always in need of a reminder that God coaches those he loves. He puts us through drills to make us stronger. He has no plans to punish you for your sin. Why not? He has already punished Jesus for them. Jesus took it all.

The passage continues, "*For what son is not disciplined by his father?* ⁸ *If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.* ⁹ *Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!* ¹⁰ *Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.*"

At a deep level, we know, not just from God's Word, but also from experience that discipline is done out of love. We may have thought our parents were cruel for grounding us. We may not have enjoyed it when the officer wrote out the speeding ticket. But in hindsight, our parents were only trying to keep us out of trouble. If everyone drove however fast they wanted, I'd be afraid to drive. The officer was trying to keep the streets safe and me alive. The discipline that came our way was for our benefit.

In this passage, you'll see an argument "from the lesser to the greater." If our parents and leaders discipline us for our own good, how much more will God, the Father of our spirits, the one who gave us spiritual life in Christ, who had us baptized, buried with Christ and washed away our sins, how much more will he do what's best for us! Our fathers and our leaders can goof up when they discipline. They are flawed and can take things too far out of anger. But God our heavenly Father is perfect in knowing what's best and he's perfect in his love for us.

Finally, this letter reminds them of the results of their discipline. He wrote, "*How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!* ¹⁰ *Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his*

holiness. ¹¹ *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*"

When God disciplines us, he draws us closer to himself. It's been said that when you're lying on your back, the only way to look is up. Through our difficult times, God removes the other options so we are relying solely on Him.

BUT, this isn't just for our *own* good. Our pain can also be for the gain of those around us. By the way you react to the discipline God sends your way, you can encourage others going through suffering of their own. The Word says, *"Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed."*

A young woman once came to her father with complaints about the persecution and trials that she faced as a Christian. Her father, a well-known chef, took her into the kitchen, filled a pot with water and put it on the stove bringing the water to a boil. He then put a crisp carrot in the water. After letting it boil for a while, he pulled it out and said, "Some people react to hardships like this carrot. They're strong and hard until they're put in boiling water. Then they grow weak and soft." He then put an egg in the water and let it boil. After a while he pulled it out and cracked it open and said, "Others are like this egg. They go in the boiling water ready to crack and run all over the place, but come out hardened and strong." Finally, the chef put some coffee grounds in the water, let them sit for a while and poured two cups of coffee, one for himself and one for his daughter. "But still others," he said, "are like this coffee. They go into the boiling water and change it."

Truth be told, we are like all those ingredients at different times. Sometimes all in the same week. But if you are exploring your connection with Jesus, and holding onto him in faith, you will go into the water and change it because you're with Him.