
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Hebrews

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Hebrews 12:4-13: *Jesus Helps in our Struggle of Faith!*

General idea: Discipline is our catalog or database for what God *is* doing and what He *can* do in our lives. It is a vehicle to the quality and result of our spiritual formation. This is not about being punished for being disobedient; rather, it is a call to be trained like an athlete being made ready for the game or as a child receiving nurture and correction to be a better person and to prepare for adulthood as a person and Christian. We can't enter the race of life and faith without preparation through diligence, obedience, and submission. This is something we are to embrace and love, not fear or try to get out of. Our goal is to know and then serve Christ; it takes honest, hard work. Remember that God nurtures and encourages us and we should also welcome His discipline, for that helps us too. Just as a loving parent corrects a child and helps him or her on the path for betterment and future, so God does with us. Even though we do not like the discipline, it is best for us. Therefore, we have no reason to feel discouraged; rather, we can endure for His glory. So get a grip on life and faith—with your main grip on Christ as Lord. He will help you go in the right way—His way—and not flounder.

Contexts and Background:

Many wealthy Romans had illegitimate children for whom they were obligated to provide, for they were citizens too. However, they rarely trained, schooled, or disciplined them. Thus, these children grew up to be hoodlums, troublemakers, and the dregs of society. They had some wealth, power, and position, but carelessness, a lack of character, and apathy or lawlessness created extreme dysfunction and greatly contributed to the breakdown of the Roman Empire civilization, just as it is doing today with our young people who lack love, hope, parental involvement, or discipline. In contrast, the Roman legitimate sons received the privilege of the finest schools and discipline, and carried the family name and received most of the inheritance. We are God's legitimate children; He loves us and wants us to receive His best and carry His name (1 John 4; 5:2)!

Commentary; Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Your struggle against sin.* A call not to compromise God's truths for our convenience or pleasure. We have to be prepared for what is ahead in life, just like preparing for an athletic event.
- *Shedding your blood.* A call to be prepared for things to worsen and for more persecution. This was an athletic term referring to boxing and the strain on the body; here, it is referring to martyrdom. None of these original hearers had experienced this yet. The words were meant to convey, *you think times are tough now? You have*

no idea of what is ahead, what others have faced, or what our Lord faced for you. So you better get ready so you can endure it (Mark 8:34-38; Heb. 10:32-34; 11:35-38).

- *Encouragement that addresses.* A quote from Proverbs 3:11-12—a call to accept discipline and repent of sins. God does not intend to hurt. He wants to mold and shape us so we can prosper for the faith no matter what life throws at us. This is God's concern and love for us. An uncaring or vengeful God could care less (Deut. 8:5; Psalm 94:12; Prov. 3:11-18).
- *As sons.* We are in God's care no matter what happens. His discipline is the proof of His love. It is God's intent, plan, and purpose to lead us further in Him to learn faith and maturity. If necessary, He will use suffering to do so, which is valuable for our benefit. Thus, since Christ and godly others have suffered to gain perfection of their spiritual formation, we should not think of ourselves better or more deserving not to suffer. This also goes to our attitude to put the work in for our spiritual growth.
- *The Lord disciplines/chastening.* Referring to the training of a child to learn to correct faults so to develop well for their future benefit and the benefit of society. As we grow in Christ, we prosper in the faith and handle life better; others are positively affected and God is glorified.
- *Endure hardship.*, when we go through tough times, we have the opportunity to see how God's Son suffered for us. His example of fortitude will enable us to learn and grow and produce a deeper relationship with God, yielding more faith and fruit (Psalm 119:67-71).
- *Discipline.* Means moral instruction, not corporal punishment. Here, it means education and the learning we gain by corrective and instructive training to know and grow. This comes from Christ and from what we have before us, as we partake of His Word so we can contextualize it to our lives to grow and mature. God's discipline is always temporary to get us lined up to what is important. If he did not do this, we would certainly fall into a worse situation. God's good discipline is always done in love; to those who are wicked and refuse to repent, the discipline is severe and eternal.
- *Illegitimate/bastard.* This meant out of wedlock and an extreme insult, hence the KJV rendering. When we ignore God, we insult Him. How would God give us our inheritance and blessing when it should go to the legitimate one, the one who is grateful and honors his Father (Gal. 4:1-2).
- *Human/earthly fathers.* Referring to those who are our genetic "flesh" and thus responsible for our care, nurture, and training; as father, parents, we are responsible for our progeny. A contrast to *father of our spirits*; as human fathers are limited in resources and wisdom, God is not and cares for us even more.

- *Father/Lord of our spirits.* This is a name of God that means *He is our Father*, who is perfect in contrast to earthly fathers who are to follow this role but who are not perfect. This is a theme of nurture, care, instruction, and correction in love and care. This is also a call to respect God and follow Him as we are to do with our earthly Father; what is more important than this for our Heavenly Lord Father (Ex. 4:22; 1 Pet. 1:15-16)?
- *God disciplines.* God's desire is to make us holy and righteous. His wisdom and help are accessible and available to us; we have only to reach out for it. He gives, but it is up to us to put it in our lives and work it out (Phil 2:12-14; 1 Pet. 1:15-16).
- *Harvest of righteousness.* Meaning Christ's holiness is our example and at our hand, yet involves our efforts to put it to use.
- *Trained.* Meaning physical strength training, referring to our spiritual growth. These efforts that are required to do anything grand or great, such as a high level athlete, also apply to pursuing the holiness of God. Thus, our relationship with Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to enter. Our continual discipleship and mentorship as well as persistent spiritual growth will give us the endurance and strength to maintain, finish, and even win the race of life. Faith comes by the efforts we put in and the hurdles we leap over that build us up even stronger and better. Any athletic injury may sideline a sportsman, but for a Christian, it will propel us even farther and faster. The key is our ability to heal, overcome our hurts and setbacks, leap over our obstacles, and avoid the pitfalls that may be ahead such as sin and bad choices.
- *Feeble/drooping arms and weak knees.* This is a warning about slacking off and not putting in the effort to do what God has called or what is right. This is apathy and laziness and God hates this attitude of *I don't care!* It shows that we care nothing about others, ministry, spiritual growth, or what God wants of us. It is the misconception or misapplication of the magnitude of His incredible gifts and His grace to us. And, as a result, we become lukewarm, disinterested, and non-committal! This is not about rest and vacations or taking a break. This is a life of purposeless and laziness that leads to rebellion and produces no faith, fruit, or righteousness (Isa. 13:7; 35:3-4; Jer. 47:3; 50:43; Ezek. 7: 17; 21:7; Hosea 13:6; Zeph. 3:16; Matt. 13:25-26; Rom. 13; Eph. 1:13-14; Heb. 3:13; James 5:11-20; 1 John 4: 7-8; Rev. 3:1-6; 14-18).
- *Level paths for your feet.* Meaning to pursue righteousness with upright character and conduct. This is a call to be educated and put into practice what you learn from putting in the time to study and grow to make this so. This also means to choose the best path like a runner looking for the best path; this was very important before good shoes were invented. Train as a good athlete does; if you do not, you are foolish and do not care about God's call and precepts (Prov. 4:25-27)!

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

It is natural for us, as human beings, to cringe at discipline, because of our sinful nature. Obedience and follow-through attack our self-importance and will. We tend to object to being contorted into an image we may perceive as too hard or might require too much time and effort. It is far easier to do what we want, when we want—to be lazy and even apathetic as we see others do it and get away with it. Yet, discipline is the tool that helps us become better. It requires effort and diligence, so the work we put in is worth what we gain, and what we build is beneficial to us and those around us. Not putting in the effort is like being on a sports team, receiving the jersey for our sport and then thinking this is all we need to compete. We are on the team; we have the letterman jacket, so we must be fit and ready and thus need no further activity or action. This should sound ridiculous, yet many Christians see their faith as such. Yes, it is natural to put forth no effort, yet it is sinful.

To illustrate this point, there is a popular mindset floating around in the church today, mostly among the young people, that all we have to do to live out the Christian life and faith is receive Christ and we then have all that we need. There is no need to be disciplined or be disciplined because the complete Christian life abides in “me.” Thus, once someone accepts Christ as Savior, his or her thinking is that *I have all the resources to live out the Christian life*. Others feel it is an unobtainable goal to walk the Christian life, so why bother. Both views believe that there is no real need to be in a Bible study or read the Word or have devotions or read good Christian literature, or have a mentor or be a mentor because *I have nothing lacking and I do not need anyone to point out what I may be deficient in, for I am self-sufficient. Christ dwells in me and is able to pull anything out He needs from me from within me*. Now, if this doesn’t cause you to bite your tongue or shutter, something may be wrong with you too. Yes, we all need to be saved by “Faith Alone,” but our faith does not stand alone. To grow in Christ, we need His Word, and we need to learn, just as this passage points out. We have to realize that it is indeed our responsibility to receive our faith and then maintain and grow our faith to live an effective, triumphant Christian life. And yes, we are given all we need, but we have to learn, know, and then apply it into our lives. If we do not, we will falter greatly in life and in the faith. Do not take my word for it; read Psalm 25, this passage in Hebrews, or any of the Gospels and Epistles!

Discipline is the effort and training we do with what Christ gives us. It is Him in action in our lives. So, allow Him to exercise His fullness for your fullness in Him. This is the faith on our part needed to be self-disciplined with spiritual fitness that builds us and His Kingdom up and gives Christ the Glory!

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?

5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What does it mean to you that you are not alone in this journey of faith and life?
2. Why do many Christians fear or avoid discipline? How would you describe discipline in its ability to show what God is doing and what He can do in your life?
3. How is your Christian life likened to an athlete being made ready for the game? How has this helped you produce a deeper relationship with God? How can it better do so?
4. Why is discipline seen as a negative or as punishment for being disobedient? How have you seen it and why?
5. Why do we need nurture and correction to be better Christian persons? Why would some people say *no* to this?
6. God nurtures and encourages us. So, how and why should we also welcome His discipline? How can you live in response with gratitude?
7. What are some distractions and bad thinking that can get in your way of growing in Christ?
8. What happens when we think we deserve everything now and do not need to work for it, desiring immediate gratification in life and in faith?
9. Why would someone who claims to be a Christian feel that they would not need to be disciplined? Or feel they do not have the time? Why would you say to someone who thinks it is an unobtainable goal to walk the Christian life, so why bother?
10. Why can't we endure the race of life and faith without putting in the necessary diligence, obedience, and submission? Why would some Christians think otherwise?
11. Are you able to throw off whatever hinders and slows you down? If not, what do you need to do to remove your sins so you can run and even win the race of life and faith?

12. How can you better welcome both God's nurture and discipline? What do you need to do better in regard to your honest, hard work of faith and discipline?

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