

# The God Who Is

## Leader's Guide

### The Father Who Disciplines

Hebrews 12:5-11

#### *Background*

Not much is known about the background of the letter to the Hebrews. The author was writing to a body of Christian believers, most of whom were (probably) from a Jewish (Hebrew) background (thus the name). The letter is rich with explanation about the relationship between the Old Testament (or "covenant" that God had made with the Jewish people) and the New Testament. Although an exact date isn't known, Hebrews was certainly written sometime during the first century AD, perhaps near 68-69 AD.

The passage we'll be looking at today talks a lot about discipline. What exactly *is* discipline?  
*Dictionary definitions: "training that corrects, molds, or perfects the moral character" or "to chasten, instruct, educate, or train a child with words, or with "calamities" (i.e. spanking, grounding)*

Give an example of when and how a father might discipline a child. Why does the father do this?

*There are many good examples. Maybe a father who raps a child's hand that has been placed on a stove burner (done to protect the child from burn later), or a father who gives his child a "time out" when the child has gone out in the street (again done to protect the child from the dangers of passing cars)*

#### *Read Hebrews 12:5-11*

This passage explains that God is a Father, and we are His children. What is God's discipline? What does it look like? How does He chasten us with words? With calamities?

*God's discipline can take many forms. It might just look like Him allowing us to face the natural consequences of our sin (getting caught cheating on a test and receiving a failing grade; an unwanted pregnancy or an s.t.d. from sex outside marriage). Or He might remove something from our lives that we are worshipping before Him (money, a relationship). Or perhaps we don't achieve, or are removed from, a position of leadership because of our moral failure. Most of these are examples of how He might discipline us with "calamities". He disciplines us with words either directly by His Word, or through the words of other believers, most commonly those in authority over us. (For instance, maybe we would just receive a sharp rebuke for our actions or lack of character).*

Most of the time we think of discipline in a negative light--we'd really rather our lives be free from hardship and difficulty. But how do v.7-8 challenge this attitude?

*These verses are a beautiful and encouraging reminder of what is a universal parenting rule: A father doesn't take the time and energy (or have the right) to correct just anybody, but only those he loves: his children. God's discipline is proof of His love for us, and His intimate involvement in our lives*

Why does God discipline us (v.10)?

*For our own good! It has got to be hard on Him, just like it is for an earthly father, but He loves us too much to not discipline us*

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Hebrews 12:5-11

How is sharing in God's holiness our good?

*It causes us to honor and please Him. We fulfill God's role for our life. When we are brought into line with God's holiness, we share greater intimacy with Him and are able to know Him better experientially. What a great privilege and honor to actually "share in His holiness"—is there anything greater?*

The word "endure" (v.7) means to "stand under". What are some ways we try to "get out from under" the hardship of discipline? What happens when we do this?

*We often try to dodge, or get out of, the consequences of our actions. We blame someone else. Or we don't receive rebuke from others—we rationalize by saying that it is THEIR issue or problem, not ours. The problem with doing this is that we don't receive the benefit of the discipline, and we are at some point going to have to learn this lesson all over again! Yuck!*

What happens when we *do* submit to God and His discipline (v.9)?

*We live! We are able to enjoy the abundant LIFE that God intended for us because we are in line with God and His purposes*

What else does v.11 say is produced in those who are trained by God's discipline? How will our lives be better *later* if we endure His discipline *now*?

*Righteousness and peace—who doesn't want those things?*

In v.11 the author of Hebrews borrows words from the worlds of agriculture ("produces a harvest") and sports (the Greek word for "train" is the same word we get "gymnasium" from—it is usually used to describe athletic training). What lessons about the costs *and* the benefits of discipline can we learn from these two worlds?

*A farmer definitely understands the concept of "delayed gratification"—that hard work (sowing seed) now will produce a wonderful crop later (reaping a harvest). It requires wisdom to remember that the benefits of the hardship are worth it.*

*An athlete also understands this concept. He has a coach who puts him through painful training, but it is worth it on "game" or "race day"—when the hardship pays off and he goes home with a prize of victory.*

Are all the hard things that happen to us a part of God's discipline?

*No. Some hard things that happen to us are a result of other people's sin (like abuse), or simply a result of living in a sin-cursed world in general. Some things, like diseases, are tricky: they might be a consequence of our own sin (again, an s.t.d. from fooling around, your liver giving out from alcoholism) but they might just be a result of living in this world. Discerning what is God's discipline and what isn't takes prayer, and possibly input from older, godly Christians.*

### Questions for personal reflection

In v.5, the author of Hebrews gives two instructions: 1) Do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and 2) Do not lose heart when He disciplines you.

1. Is there any discipline from God that you are making light of? What do you need to do to take it more seriously?
2. Are you discouraged about the discipline from God you're enduring right now? How can this passage give you hope and encouragement? Maybe read through the passage again, inserting your particular situation whenever you see the word "hardship" or "discipline".

### Passages For Further Study:

The whole book of Proverbs!  
(See 1:7; 3:11-12; 6:23; 10:17; 15:5,32)  
Romans 5:1-5  
James 1:2-4  
1 Peter 1:3-9