

Life Lessons From Desert Wandering: Discipline

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Most companies in America have some type of protocol for handing out discipline. One company I worked for liked the three-reprimand method which was a good method. You get three reprimands and then you would be dismissed unless the charge called for immediate dismissal. Plus, you would reprimand a person for something that was bad. The place I work for now reprimands for whatever they feel like. One of the reasons why some of the departments is unionized. Healthy discipline is needed to keep an orderly company. If not, employees will try to get away with anything – theft or shrink. In fact, most places will have a new employee read over the laws of the company and then sign a paper that they had read the laws. In other words, it makes it easier to discipline someone who knowingly disobeys company policy. Discipline is needed in business.

In Christianity today, discipline is a weak term. We enjoy talking about the love of Jesus and we should. His love is a wonderful item. However, discipline is part of the love of Jesus. We talked about obedience last week and how if we really love the Trinity, we will want to be obedient to their will out of love for them. So, now, for the Trinity to love us, discipline is part of that mix. As we continue the journey through Israel's journey in the Wilderness, we'll look at God's view of discipline.

So, let's turn to Deuteronomy 8: 1-5 where we read this, "The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers. ² And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. ³ And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know

that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word^[a] that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. ⁵Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. (ESV - Biblegateway.com)

So, we see that God tells Israel that they are to follow every command He was going to give them. Commands that was only for the good for Israel. If they were obedient to God's commands, they would be able to live and possess a land that was promised to them – land flowing with milk and honey. Then, God reminds them about what He had done so that they could go this far in their journey. A journey that was only done by God's leading and helping. Israel would still be in slavery if it wouldn't be for God's intervention. Then in verse three, we read, "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known." While Israel was on their journey to the promise land, Scripture tells us God humbled them by causing them to be hungry. Let's turn back to the story in Exodus 16: 2, "There, too, the whole community of Israel spoke bitterly against Moses and Aaron. 'Oh, that we were back in Egypt,' they mourned. 'It would have been better if the Lord had killed us there! At least there we had plenty to eat. But now you have brought us into this desert to starve us to death.' (NLT)" These people were suffering from hunger and they went against Moses and Aaron because they were representing God. So, if we go back to Deuteronomy, we see God caused this hunger to humble them before Him. This is part of discipline. Israel had an attitude problem just like some of us did when we were kids. I remember the one Andy Griffith Show where Opie's friend would ride his bike on the sidewalks and he was told not to, but he did anyway. When the boy and his father are in front of Andy at the station, the boy has a temper tantrum. So, Andy lets the father know there is a nice woodshed out in back of the building. In other words, a good spot to give the boy an old fashion spanking. So, God knew Israel better than they knew themselves, so God knew they needed this discipline through hunger to learn humbleness. Discipline helps to create humbleness. However, some people have a problem with God causing this to happen. God caused their hunger to happen by allowing it to happen. Just like with Job, God allowed satan to do harm to Job.

So, we need to get into the right frame of mind for the discipline from God. Not all bad things that happen to us are for discipline. We live in a fallen world filled with sin and everyone suffers from that sin, but God can use that sin for the good for us. Peter tells us this in 1 Peter 4: 12-13, "Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead be very glad – because these trials will make you partners with Christ in his suffering, and afterward you will have the wonderful joy of sharing his glory when it is displayed to all the world. (NLT)" Now, Peter is talking to the Church of His day that was being persecuted for their faith and Peter is trying to get them in the right frame of mind for suffering. He tells them to be very glad because they are sharing in the suffering for Jesus Christ. In the same way, we should be in the right frame of mind for discipline from God. God allows some events to happen to wake us up or to use them to help us draw closer to Him which is a good thing. You see, Peter saw persecution for faith through the eyes of the Holy Spirit. There is no way you can be glad with persecution on your own because your human nature will shape your view of suffering. The same goes with discipline from God. God is trying to let Israel know that He is disciplining them for their own good like a parent disciplines a child. To add more salt to this, let's turn back to Deuteronomy 8: 5, "Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you. (NLT)" The Hebrew term used for "disciplines" is "yasar" which means to correct, to instruct, to train, to strengthen (Strong's Concordance). So, discipline is actually a good thing when done in the right way. Some parents abuse the term. Discipline is good for us even though we don't like it. Now, there is a second part to the "yasar" definition that I didn't state. The second part to this Hebrew term is "to accept correction" (Strong's Concordance). God had let Israel know why He was disciplining them in chapter 8 and in fact, God does that throughout the Old Testament. We also read how Israel usually always complained about their discipline like we did when we were children. Peter has a totally different mindset on suffering and I'm sure that mindset was the same for discipline from God. It was different from the people of Israel in the Old Testament because Peter had the Holy Spirit shaping his thinking and the Spirit of God shaped His view of suffering. As I dug more and more into this, the

more I saw the grace of God. This same Spirit helps us to see the good of discipline from God. We need it.

We need the Lord's discipline in our lives because it keeps us humble, but also helps us to not forget. What do I mean by this? Let's turn to Deuteronomy 8: 10 – 18 where we read this, ¹⁰ "And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you." ¹¹ "Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, ¹² lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, ¹⁵ who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, ¹⁶ who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. ¹⁷ Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' ¹⁸ You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. (Biblegateway.com)

God's discipline keeps us humble before Him. People today still have the same problem as Israel did – forget about what God has done in their lives. Verse 14 states that the human heart will become proud when it forgets about the works of God in their life. Look how easy it is to take credit for what God has done. This is easy for anyone. I believe it was last year where CBN news was interviewing a pastor of a large church in Scotland. They had a revival going on there and they asked him what he did to get this started and he told them he did nothing to start it. God started it and they were just trying to be obedient to His Will during this revival that God created. This pastor could have taken the easy way and talked about all that he had done and how he was going to write a book about it. God has to discipline us at times because we can become proud of ourselves when it was God who actually should get the credit. God knows the human heart and He

knows how we like to give credit to ourselves. How many times have we told ourselves this in verse 17, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." We need humbled and God's discipline helps us with that.

So, to tie all this together. God disciplines those that He loves. For us to get into the right frame of mind as Peter, who saw suffering from persecution as a way to be joyful, we need the right frame of mind to see suffering for Jesus and being disciplined by Him in the right way. We should be thankful for His discipline because it shows His love for us and helps us with our love for Him. His discipline helps to confirm His covenant with us through Jesus Christ. He disciplines us because He loves us. His Spirit will help us to see that in the right holy perspective just like it did for Peter. Let's pray that the Holy Spirit will shape our thinking on suffering and on God's discipline when we do wrong.

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.: Wheaton, 1996.

The Strongest Strong's Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001