

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise You and thank You for all the love, goodness and faithfulness You have poured out on us over the years. You have given us many wonderful gifts; help us therefore to accept the difficulties and troubles that come our way, and bear them in the knowledge that You are in control of all things and always leading us towards our eternal salvation. Thank You heavenly Father; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Fire services

Pray for those in the fire services nearest to your home and your church. Pray God's blessing on them and their work in saving lives and assisting people in grave danger.

On-going prayers

- *Pray about Pakistan and its internal war against the Taleban*
- *Ask God to stir up industrial leaders to clean up their industries*
- *Give thanks to God for your health, and His power to heal*

Meditation

Lord God, give us courage to demonstrate what we believe;

Let us be compassionate because of Jesus' love for us,
Let us be brave because we trust in the Lord's protection:

Let us be peaceful because Jesus taught the way of peace,
Let us be victorious over evil because the battle has been won:

Let us be careful because God's Word teaches us to be wise,
Let us be daring in action because we trust Your guidance:

Let us be honest because the Gospel demands our integrity,
Let us be forthright because we believe God's Word is truth.

Lord God, continue to inspire us by our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Bible Study - Hebrews 12:7-11

⁷ Stand firm as a matter of discipline; God deals with you like children, for what child is not disciplined by a father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined, as all else have been, then you are not true children but illegitimate. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human parents to discipline us and we respected them. Should we not therefore be willing to submit to the Father of our spirits and live? ¹⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a limited time period as seemed best to them; but the Father does this for our benefit, so that we may share His holiness. ¹¹ Discipline feels difficult rather than enjoyable at the time, but it results in a harmonious harvest of righteousness for those who have been trained by it.

Review

The subject of discipline is not straightforward, but this passage is one of the clearest passage about discipline within the entire Bible. It uses what we know about discipline

from the upbringing of children to make some pertinent points about Christian discipleship. In general, the passage relies on the concept of wisdom in the Old Testament, in particular, the first nine chapters of Proverbs which has a similar general theme to this; but it does not make any direct quotes. However, the author makes a direct appeal to us to accept that personal discipline lies at the heart of all successful personal relationships, and discipline will therefore be an essential part of our relationship with God, through Jesus. Whilst faith may be considered to be the starting point of our relationship with God (see chapter 11), discipline is a key feature of what comes next (12:7,8). However, we must understand one thing, which is that in this text, 'discipline' does not mean 'punishment'.

So what does 'discipline' mean in this passage? To begin with, it is important for us to know that although the word 'discipline' in English is very similar to the word 'disciple', the two words are very different in New Testament Greek. Put as simply as possible, the Greek word 'disciple' means 'one who follows', but the Greek word for 'discipline' relates to structured instruction and learning. Because of this it would be possible to translate verses 7 and 8 to reflect 'learning' and below, I set out what I mean, in comparison to the passage as translated above;

'Stand firm on the grounds of what you have learned; God deals with you like children, for what child is not taught by a father? If you have not been taught, as all else have been, then you are not true children but illegitimate ...' (alternative translation).

Stand firm as a matter of discipline; God deals with you like children, for what child is not disciplined by a father? If you are not disciplined, as all else have been, then you are not true children but illegitimate. (translation above)

Having read these two alternatives, it may help you to read the rest of the passage with a greater understanding of what 'discipline' actually means here in this Scripture. The reason I have kept the word 'discipline' in the translation, however, is because it still conveys the idea of learning what is essential and cannot be missed, as a matter of 'discipline'. In ancient times, children were not taught in schools but by their parents, and in particular, boys were taught by their fathers (or as the text says, 'disciplined' – 12:10) in their teenage years. It is a very different picture to life today! Nowadays, the word 'discipline' is still part of education, but it describes the structure necessary for learning rather than actual learning. But still, we talk of each subject taught at school or university as a 'discipline', and you cannot learn anything about that subject unless you accept and use the disciplines of that subject. If you learn music you must learn the disciplines of practicing scales, if you learn a language you accept the discipline of learning 'grammar', if you learn physics you must use the discipline of mathematics. The list goes on.

Our reading today challenges us because it tells us that after faith, the next most important thing in our relationship with the Lord is the discipline of learning about Him and His Word. He may wish to teach us how to manage our lives, or to be sensitive to the Spirit; or He may wish us to learn about His Word, the Bible; or learn how to pray. All of these are 'disciplines' of learning, and Hebrews tells us that we must accept the Lord's discipline (12:8), which does not mean we must accept being punished if we do not do what He says! It means accepting that things like Bible study and prayer have their 'disciplines', and we will not achieve the Father's will for us unless we learn them. It also says that just as we respect those who have taught us what we know, we should respect our Lord who has taught us the truth of life (12:9). Hebrews continues the comparison by reminding us that earthly fathers or teachers can only help us for a short period of time, but the Lord always leads us on and teaches us more; this is the path of true holiness (12:10)!

Lastly, verse 11 is sometimes translated as if the subject is discipline in the form of corporal punishment. It is not. Some Bible versions say 'discipline is painful for a time but yields a harvest ...' (12:11), and it is unfortunately true that this has been used in past generations to justify the physical punishment of children in schools. If you have followed what I have said here, you will quickly realise that the whole sentence is about the discipline of learning. All this verse says is that the discipline of learning can be hard work, but it is worth it, and doing what our Lord asks of us yields a fruit for the Kingdom of God! There is nothing here to make us ashamed or fearful, as if God is standing over us with a big stick to punish us when we get things wrong; God forbid that we should think this, and may God save us from such a dreadful way of interpreting His Word!

In conclusion, few Christians think of learning as the second most important thing in our relationship with God after faith. However, if you think of our ignorance compared with God's wisdom, then it is obvious that we need to learn from Him. How else can we grow in faith? That is exactly what this passage says.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In what ways is the word 'discipline' used negatively and positively today? Check out whether you understand what the study says today.
2. Hebrews says that if we will not allow ourselves to be disciplined by the Lord, we are 'illegitimate'. Discuss what this means.
3. How can 'discipline' be part of the path of holiness? (12:10)

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The more I think about this subject, the more I feel that all this is rather important. I have met so many Christians who have a very bad personal attitude towards learning because they had a difficult time at school. Nevertheless, they have learned over the years to be a good husband or wife, and have learned how to work themselves into a good job and know the disciplines of this job very well. Then, in church, if you say that learning about your faith requires 'discipline', then people shy away rapidly, and consequently, the devil has used earthly experiences to put a stop to our spiritual growth!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Check out what this passage of Hebrews says to you about learning, according to the study today. What do you feel about learning and your own ability to learn. Pray and ask the Lord to help you to learn about your faith and enjoy it.*
- *Pray about 'learning' and the disciplines of learning within the church today. Pray that God's people will shed the negative experiences that many people have of learning today, and embrace learning about God wholeheartedly.*

Final Prayer

O Lord, when people all around us reject the Christian faith, give us the presence of mind to stand firm in You. Your hand is our guide, Your Spirit is our strength and Your love is our comfort. If we remain in Your presence, then no-one can take this away from us. AMEN