

## INTRODUCTION

Over the 43 years that I've been married to Cindy, I have often helped her father, J.R., in his woodworking shop. He was a master builder who created hundreds of pieces of furniture and plenty of wooden toys for the grandchildren and great grandchildren.

His health doesn't allow him to work much anymore.

I was never a master builder but sometimes I would be his helper. I did learn enough to know that before you painted or stained the wood, you had to take sandpaper and smooth out the rough parts. The wood had to be sanded several times before it was ready to receive the coat of paint or stain.

Sometimes I would start with a coarse sandpaper like 60 grit, and even though the wood seemed smooth, then I would then use finer sandpaper like 120 grit to really smooth it out. Finally, after several runs with the sandpaper, I would wipe away the fine sawdust. Only then would the wood be ready for the finish. Before long, what was once several rough pieces of wood turned into a beautiful piece of furniture.

We are all like this rough piece of wood. None of us are perfect. And the Master Carpenter wants to improve us to prepare us for His perfect finish to be applied to our lives. In Philippians 1:6 the Bible says, "For I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Sometimes God has to use some heavenly sandpaper to smooth out our rough edges. It's not a pleasant experience. Sometimes He has to use coarse sandpaper, sometimes He uses finer sandpaper. But He is just preparing us for His wonderful finish to be applied to our lives.

These Hebrew believers were going through times of suffering and they were tempted to give up and go back into their old religion. They didn't know WHY they were suffering. The writer of Hebrews encourages them to be strong; what they were going through was God's sandpaper being applied to the rough parts of their lives.

Hebrews 12:3-13 (CSB). "For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you won't grow weary and give up. In struggling against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons: 'My son, do not take the Lord's discipline lightly or lose heart when you are reproved by him, for the Lord disciplines the one he loves and punishes every son he receives.' [Proverbs 3:11-12] Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline—which all receive—then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had human fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn't we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time based on what seemed good to them, but he does it for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness. No discipline seems

enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. 'Therefore, strengthen your tired hands and weakened knees' [Isaiah 35:3], 'and make straight paths for your feet' [Proverbs 4:26], so that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed instead."

I'm going to be talking about God's loving discipline in this message. God's discipline is compared to the discipline we received from our earthly parents. I'm going to talk about how my parents disciplined me. My mother used a hickory switch, and my father used his belt folded over—and while that may sound severe, I want to point out that my parents never abused me. Every time I got a spanking, I deserved it and there were times I deserved one and didn't get one. My parents weren't perfect and I'm not a perfect father, but our Heavenly Father is perfect. And His discipline is perfect for us.

Now, I don't know your story. I don't know how or if your parents disciplined you. I suspect in a crowd this large some of you were abused. Others of you had permissive parents who never disciplined you; both extremes can have negative results.

So I have to add this very important disclaimer at the beginning of this message: There is NEVER an excuse for child abuse. And regardless of how you were disciplined (or not disciplined) by your earthly parents, God's discipline is perfect.

If you are a child of God, there WILL be times when you experience God's loving discipline. It's not pleasant; in fact it's painful. And this passage gives us four things we should be doing when we are experiencing God's sandpaper.

### **1. Realize your trials could be worse.**

Our example to follow during our suffering is Jesus. In verse three we are told to consider him who endured such hostility. We know what the Roman soldiers did to Jesus. They whipped Him until His back was bleeding. They crushed a crown made of long, nail-like thorns on His head. Then the writer reminds the readers that they haven't suffered like Jesus. He wrote, "In struggling against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." (Hebrews 12:4 CSB) The key words there are "not yet." Because we know from history that in just a few years after this letter was written, thousands of Christians did shed their blood for their faith. But it wasn't widespread when this letter was written.

There is a terrible Christian heresy making the rounds in the U.S. and around the world. It's the teaching that if you will just have enough faith you'll always be healthy and wealthy. Some immature Christians swallow this lie and then feel guilty because they're sick and poor and they blamed themselves; it's because they don't have enough faith.

But when you read the Bible, you find there is a thread of suffering that runs through the lives of every person in the Bible. I love Ray Stedman's definition of a Christian. He wrote: "A Christian is someone who is completely fearless; continually cheerful, and constantly in trouble."

Now, just because you're suffering doesn't necessarily mean God is disciplining you. There are many sources of suffering. Some suffering is just the result of living in a fallen, broken world. That's why there are diseases and natural disasters. Some suffering is the result of poor choices we make ourselves. If you choose to put your hand in a fire there's going to be pain—but that's not God's discipline—it's the consequence of a dumb choice you made.

And some suffering comes from our adversary the devil. But the devil can only inflict as much pain on us as God allows. Job suffered mightily at the hand of the devil, but Job never blamed God or lost his faith.

Other times we suffer because of evil people who inflict pain on us. But the truth is, God can use ALL pain for His glory, regardless of the source of the suffering.

Take Joseph as an example. His brothers beat him up and sold him into slavery: He suffered. Potiphar's wife lied about him and he suffered in jail. But you never hear Joseph saying, "That's just bad luck." Or "that's the way the cookie crumbles." Or "when it rains it pours." He saw God's sandpaper all throughout the process. He told his brothers later, "You planned evil against me. But God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people." (Genesis 50:20 HCSB)

## **2. Remember that the Father ONLY disciplines His children in love.**

It's actually a good thing for you to experience the discipline of God. That is proof that you are truly one of His children. When my girls were growing up, we would discipline them if they misbehaved. But we never disciplined the neighbor's kids. That wasn't our job. And this passage clearly says that God ONLY disciplines His children. The Bible says, "For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and punishes every son he receives. Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons." (Hebrews 12:6-7 CSB)

God disciplines His true children. So, it's good for you to stop for a moment and ask yourself. Can I point to a time in my life when God was using His sandpaper on me? If you can't think of a single time God disciplined you, there are several options. (1) He disciplined you, and you have forgotten it; (2) He disciplined you and you didn't recognize it as His loving discipline; or (3) you are not truly a child of God.

So how do you recognize the discipline of God? Like earthly parents, there are different levels of discipline God uses.

### **A. A simple rebuke.**

This the fine sandpaper. It hurts the least. In verse five it speaks of God's rebuke. If a child is misbehaving, sometimes all a parent needs to say is, "Stop doing that right now!" Some children are so tenderhearted that a word from mom or dad is all it takes. You can point your finger and them and shake your head, and their eyes fill up with tears.

And sometimes that's all God uses. He may send a rebuke in His word, and that's all it takes. Or God may use someone else to rebuke us. When Simon Peter visited Antioch, he ate bacon with the Gentile Christians. But when the other Jewish leaders from Jerusalem arrived, Peter only ate at the kosher table. Paul rebuked Peter openly and it seemed to work.

I want to be so tenderhearted toward the things of God that I will respond to His rebukes without any other form of discipline. If God is rebuking you, obey him immediately to avoid the next level of punishment.

### **B. A stronger restriction.**

This sandpaper is rougher. Sometimes a rebuke isn't enough. If rebellion continues, it may result in a limitation. Parents often call that grounding a child. Parents used to send their children to their rooms without supper for discipline, but now with their smartphones, PlayStations, and microwaves, they love being sent to their rooms! Today, taking away cell phone, or computer privileges is a form of discipline. They may say, "You can't go to this party, or drive for a certain time." They are withholding privileges.

We see this form of discipline in the Bible. God sometimes holds back blessings as discipline. God rebuked Moses many times about his temper. And finally, Moses took it too far and struck the rock in the wilderness when God had told him to speak to it. So God said, "Okay, Moses, you're grounded. No holy land for you. You are limited to the land outside the Promised Land. Has God grounded you in some way because of your disobedience? Repent and get back on track because you don't want the next level of discipline.

### **C. A stinging rod.**

This is the heavy-duty sandpaper. The quotation from Proverbs 3 refers to corporal punishment. This can be painful at times. Paul said he had been given a thorn in the flesh so that he wouldn't be given over to boasting. He asked God to take it away, but God didn't. Instead God gave him the grace to endure it.

Just this past week in our daily Bible reading, in 2 Chronicles 26, King Uzziah directly disobeyed God. He became arrogant and entered the Temple to make a sacrifice. The High Priest warned him not to. That was the rebuke. He said, "Don't go any farther!" That was the restriction. But Uzziah went anyway—and then came the rod—he was struck with leprosy. He went from royalty to leprosy because of disobedience.

We sometimes forget that in Psalm 23, we confess that it is both the rod of God and the staff of God that comforts us. The rod was used to tap a wayward lamb, and the staff was used to steer the lamb back toward the flock. The great writer Arthur Pink used to say, "We should pay close attention to God's taps before they become God's raps."

This is a good place to talk about human parenting. There's a saying people think is in the Bible: "Spare the rod; spoil the child." No, that's NOT in the Bible, but there are several verses in

Proverbs about the benefits of parental discipline. The Bible says, "Foolishness is bound to the heart of a youth; a rod of discipline will separate it from him." (Proverbs 22:15 CSB)

We live in an age where there is an anti-spanking movement. James Dobson and Focus on the Family suggest that mild spanking may be effective on rebellious children between the ages of two and ten. How many of you ever received a spanking as a child? I think there's a reason the bible speaks of a rod: It's a neutral object.

Let me repeat what I've said about this in the past to young parents. If you are going to punish your child, don't use your hand. Your hands should only be used to express love and affection. We used a little paint stirring stick that we called "the Trouble Stick." Some parents use a wooden mixing spoon. Here are some other guidelines for using a trouble stick. Never punish your child publicly; it should always be a private affair. There's an old saying about being taken to the woodshed—that meant going to a private place away from the eyes of others. And never punish your child in anger. Parenting can be exasperating, but calm down before you use the trouble stick. And always talk to your child before and after using the trouble stick; tell them WHY they are being punished, and afterwards hug them and tell them how much you love them. And for those of us who ever used the trouble stick, we really understand that it hurt us more than it hurt them. But if that's the model of our Loving Heavenly Father, there are times we should follow His model.

### **3. Rejoice that God's discipline produces good fruit.**

God doesn't want us to slap a silly grin on our face in the midst of our suffering and say, "Hallelujah, this hurts!" Instead, He wants us to simply smile and say, "Hallelujah, this is going to help me." In other words, you don't rejoice in the suffering, but you rejoice in the knowledge of what the suffering will do for you. God's discipline always produces good fruit.

The writer says, "No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:11 CSB)

That word, "trained" is one you'll recognize. It's the word *gymnasio*. We go to the gym to train so we'll be stronger. An in the gym people say, "No pain. No gain." God's discipline is to train us to be stronger Christians. At the moment of that fortieth push up you may not enjoy it—but you will enjoy the benefits of it later.

When my dad was whaling away on me, I never said, "Oh Thank you, dad! This is wonderful! Keep it up! I appreciate you teaching me the lessons of obedience!" But later on I realized what he was doing was teaching me an important lesson about submitting to his authority. Children who don't learn to submit to their authority of their parents often will have trouble submitting to the authority of their teachers, their bosses, and even law enforcement officers.

You must understand that there is a world of difference between God punishing sin and God disciplining His children. God sometimes uses punishment as part of His discipline, that's when He uses the rod.

Philip Yancey is one of my favorite authors. He wrote the book *What's so Amazing About Grace?* He tells the story about being on a safari in Africa to observe the animals in the wild. He witnessed a strange sight he couldn't believe. There were two giraffes. One was large and the other was tiny. He watched as the larger giraffe kicked the smaller giraffe to the ground. When the smaller giraffe got back to its feet, the larger giraffe kicked it to the ground again. This went on several times, so Philip Yancey asked the guide what was happening. The guide said, "The big giraffe is the mother, the smaller giraffe is her baby. The only defense a small giraffe has against a predator is to jump quickly to their feet and flee. If it cannot do this it will die." So what seems to be a cruel thing is actually the best thing the mother can do for her baby.

God's discipline results in the good fruit of righteousness. The sandpaper is rough and irritating, but the result is a piece of wood that is ready to receive the coat of paint or stain.

#### **4. Return with confidence to the race God has laid out for you!**

After the discussion about the Father's discipline, these words in verses twelve and thirteen almost sound random. He writes about tired hands, weak knees, and lame feet. It almost sounds like a commercial for arthritis medicine! But the writer is quoting two Old Testament passages. They are two strong verses of encouragement to keep running the race.

The Bible says, "Strengthen the weak hands, steady the shaking knees! Say to the cowardly: 'Be strong; do not fear!'" (Isaiah 35:3-4 CSB) Then in Proverbs we read, "Carefully consider the path for your feet, and all your ways will be established. Don't turn to the right or to the left; keep your feet away from evil." (Proverbs 4:26-27 CSB)

In the beginning of Hebrews 12, we are encouraged to run the race with patience, keeping our eyes on Jesus. One reason people get weary in the race is because of suffering. The writer is challenging these discouraged believers to get back in the race. Don't let suffering slow you down.

That's the message to us today. Sometimes the road is rough. Sometimes we find ourselves under the hand of the Master Carpenter and He is using sandpaper to smooth out our character. So when that happens—don't quit. Keep your eyes on Jesus!

#### **CONCLUSION**

When I was a kid, I had a foolish and rebellious personality. I was a mischievous little brat. I was that kid every children's worker dreads to work with in Sunday School. In church, I was even called down several times by the pastor in the middle of his sermon and told to behave. Of course, I was misbehaving with the pastor's son.

When I was just five or six years old, I would drive my mother crazy by running away in the neighborhood, just to get her to try to come find me.

Sometimes all it took was a rebuke from my father or mother and I would settle down. At other times I would be restricted. I loved to play baseball and ride my bike. I can remember times when I wasn't allowed to ride my bike or play baseball for a week.

But there were plenty of times when the rod of correction was needed. I got plenty of spankings at home, and even some at school. More than once my school principal applied the board of education to my seat of understanding. It wasn't that I disliked school; it was just the principal of the thing.

My mother used a hickory switch to discipline me. She kept it hanging over the stove in the kitchen. There was a little sign with it that said, "I need Thee; Every Hour I need Thee." I didn't know that was a hymn, I thought it was referring to the switch.

I usually got a double-dose of discipline. If my mother had to use the switch, when she told my dad what I had done, he usually confirmed her discipline. He would take his belt off and fold it over. He would say, "Son this is going to hurt me more than it hurts you." I wanted to say, "Dad, don't hurt yourself so much."

He would always tell me what I had done that deserved the discipline, and then he would start. He would hold my arm and start the lashes. We would go around in a circle, and I would usually be yelling, "I'll be good, daddy. I'll be good!"

After a few years, I learned a trick to make the discipline more bearable. At the beginning, I would try to pull as far away from my father as I could. I didn't understand physics or centrifugal force, but I figured out that the outside arc of his belt was going a lot faster than the inside of the belt. So after a few years, I learned that when my dad disciplined me, I stopped trying to pull away. I would get as close to him as I could; I would almost hug him. And the inside of that belt wasn't going nearly as fast as the outside. I learned a great lesson about God also. My friend, when you are experiencing the discipline of the Lord—don't resist. Don't pull away. Submit to His sandpaper. Get as close to Him as you can the pain of the discipline will be much less.

So there are times when God uses His Holy Sandpaper to smooth out the rough edges of our character. It may be a gentle rebuke, or a stronger restriction. And sometimes He uses the rod but He always disciplines us in love to make us more like Jesus.

So don't resist Him during those sandpaper experiences. Submit to Him and trust Him. The finished product is going to be much more beautiful than you can ever imagine.

## OUTLINE

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor  
Green Acres Baptist Church  
Tyler, Texas*

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