

Fatherly Discipline  
Hebrews 12:7-13  
Bellevue Baptist Church  
March 1, 2026

If I said, "Tell me about your dad, what images or moments come to mind? Hopefully, positive. You might describe the roar of his laughter around your family's favorite boardgame. Or the sound of his lure hitting the lake on your annual fishing trip. Many of you were raised by a good father.

And it seems likely that some of you weren't? When asked the same question, you might say: "I remember the smell of his breath on those nights he staggered in from the bar." Or "I remember the words he spoke as he drove away from the house, never to return."

What comes to mind when you think about your father matters, because whether we like to admit it, or not, our dads have a profound influence on our lives.

In the opening page of his memoir, actor Will Smith says this:

**I've always thought of myself as a coward. Most of my memories of my childhood involve me being afraid in some way— afraid of other kids, afraid of being hurt or embarrassed, afraid of being seen as weak.**

**But mostly, I was afraid of my father.**

**When I was nine years old, I watched my father punch my mother in the side of her head so hard that she collapsed. I saw her spit blood. That moment in that bedroom, probably more than any other moment in my life, has defined who I am today.**

Think about the impact that a father has on a child.

**Show image of the Will Smith hitting Chris Rock.**

As a wise man once said: "Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them."

When you were a child, the influence of the man in or out of the house was massive. So massive that Scripture says the sins of the father may have a ripple effect to the third and fourth generation.

So what's the point? You ask. I say all this to introduce our text today, which paints a picture of God in heaven as the good father who knows what's best for his children. In Hebrews 12, we are told that He is like a benevolent earthly father—not a cold disciplinarian known by the sound of his belt loops, but a father who loves His children too much to leave them unchanged. He lets us do hard things.

That's what Hebrews 12 invites us to see.

**<sup>7</sup> Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup> But if you are without discipline—which all receive—then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup> Furthermore, we had human fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn't we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live? <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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.**

**<sup>12</sup> Therefore, strengthen your tired hands and weakened knees, <sup>13</sup> and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed instead. —Heb 12:7–14**

In this passage, we see clearly the three reasons why God allows pain to enter our lives. He's a good father who lets us suffer, for good reasons. Why? Why would a good dad let his child hurt? Three reasons are given. First:

### **1. Pain means you belong. (vv. 7–9)**

Notice in v. 8...

*<sup>7</sup> Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup> But if you are without discipline—which all receive—then you are illegitimate children and not sons.*

If you are being disciplined, it's because you have a dad, who is highly engaged in your life. He intervenes because He sees you as His.

I don't know about you, but when my kids were little, and I would observe them on the playground, I did not feel obligated to take someone else's child by the hand and put them in timeout for pushing another kid down the slide. Somebody else's kid is not my business.

That's the point here. You have a Father who is highly engaged in your life—always aware of what's happening with you. Always paying attention to your coming-and-going, and most importantly—whether you are growing.

The most unloving act of a father is to pay no attention to his kids. A bad dad has no interest in his son or daughter's life. And as I said before, in order to love your Father in heaven, you may have to delete some of the files in your mind pertaining to your own dad.

The outgoing CEO of Disney, Bob Iger, once wrote about his memories of his father, a man who battled depression for decades. Bob never knew what kind of dad was coming through the door each night. His dad was emotionally volatile. He writes:

**As the older child, I bore the brunt of his emotional unpredictability. I never felt threatened by his moods, but I was acutely aware of his dark side and felt sad for him. We never knew which Dad was coming home at night, and I can distinctly recall sitting in my room on the second floor of our house, knowing by the sound of the way he opened and shut the door and walked up the steps whether it was happy or sad Dad. –Bob Iger**

Imagine this man Bob, as a little boy, listening carefully to the sound of the front door, and knowing in that moment whether the night would be heaven or hell.

You can be thankful, says Hebrews 12, that your Father in heaven is not like this. God always knows what is best for us. He's not moody nor is He manipulative. He is not an over-reactor. He simply knows what you need, even if it's not what you would wish for.

As the great theologian Garth Brooks once said, "Some of greatest gifts are unanswered prayers."

Sometimes our Father calls us to endure.

V. 7 says: Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons.

Be encouraged—you have a highly engaged, emotionally stable Father in heaven, who always has your best interests in mind.

Think about Jesus, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame and now sits at the right hand of the FATHER. The Father allowed the Son to be flogged—the cat-of-nine-tails ripping the skin from his back. The Father allowed for the Son to be beaten by the guards, their spit upon his face. Long nails pounded through his wrists and through his feet. As his body slumped against the wood, suffocation set in, but in his last moments, he cried what each of us cries at some moment in our lives: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

Quoting Psalm 22:1, Jesus fulfills an ancient prophecy while also saying something that all humans eventually feel—where is God now? When I need Him? Where is my Father?

The Father loved the Son, but knew that pain was part of the process.

You may not feel it today, as your prayers go unanswered, but if the Bible is true, then you can find comfort in knowing that this too will pass, whatever you're going through.

Discipline confirms our identity as children. Now, the text proceeds, reminding us of pain's result. In v.10, we see the second purpose:

## **2. Pain is producing fruit in you (vv. 10–11)**

Pay attention to v.11...

*<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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.*

Before parents bring discipline, they usually say: “this is going to hurt me more than it hurts you.” No kid in history has ever believed it, but when Scripture says that no discipline seems enjoyable at the time, this goes for the parent also. In Life Groups this morning, when your group took time to mention praises, no person raised their hand and said, “I just have to say what a joy it was to sit down with my teenager and explain why he is now grounded for a month. What a good time. I just love to make my children miserable.

No, a good parent would rather be rewarding the teen, buying ice cream.

Discipline is not pleasant for the parent.

And it certainly isn't pleasant for the child. I can recall, once as a kid, I was punished for something that I felt was unfair. In my mind, this was one of the great injustices in human history. If only my Father knew he was making a mountain out of a mole hill. I was so filled with rage that I marched upstairs, looked into the mirror and started shadow boxing my old man. Throwing punches at the air because I was angry for the way he was making my life less enjoyable. This was not my most mature moment.

All through the Scriptures we see examples of God putting his people through the ringer of pain, and the best ones believed the best about the Father, refusing to become bitter.

- God allowed Joseph to endure betrayal and imprisonment, which humbled him and prepared him to save a nation.
- God sent Moses into forty years of obscurity, to make him a meek shepherd who was ready to rescue his people.

- God allowed Hannah to endure years of infertility so that her long-awaited son would be fully surrendered to the Lord.
- God placed Esther under enormous pressure, that she might be the means of deliverance.
- God permitted David to be hunted like a criminal so that he would learn to depend on the Lord rather than his own strength.
- God allowed Job to suffer great loss so his faith would move from secondhand knowledge to a deep personal intimacy.
- God gave Paul a persistent thorn in the flesh—that the apostle’s power would rest on grace rather than gifting.

When we read these stories, we step back and say: If God allowed these saints to suffer, why be surprised when its my turn?

One of the first things we must learn in this life is to accept suffering, to avoid thrashing in the water, to be calm when the cancer comes, to consider it pure joy when the job ends, to believe God’s not done when the unwanted divorce is filed. In moments when life brings the searing pain of loss, we must train our minds to say with Job, “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Once I spoke with an employee at Lifeway and when I inquired about her family, she shared that her marriage had ended in divorce. I told her that I was sorry to hear that, and she said, “We had some wonderful years together.” I was amazed that she had no bitterness. No toxic emotions. No anger. Only the Lord can do that kind of thing in the human heart.

Shadowboxing with God is a waste of my energy. Yours too.

So we’ve learned that pain teaches us we are legitimate children, and pain is producing a harvest when we accept it, when we allow ourselves to be trained by it. And now, comes the hard part...Hebrews says:

### **3. Pain requires a response from you. (vv. 12–13)**

*Therefore, strengthen your tired hands and weakened knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed instead.” (vv. 12–13)*

Now the writer uses an illustration from the world of physical therapy. When we get hurt, we have to go through rehabilitation, like an athlete after an injury. You strengthen what has grown weak.

I want you to look at your Bible here and circle the three parts of the body he points out: the hands, the knees, and the feet. Each has a role in suffering.

First, the hands. Hands represent our work, our responsibilities, our service. In seasons of suffering, the temptation is to disengage. To drop the load. To lose sight of what God has already put in front of us. But the call here is simple and steady: keep showing up. Keep punching in. Keep doing the work God has given you to do, as long as you have the health and capacity to do it. Do not let suffering distract you from your purpose.

This reminds me of Nehemiah. God called him to rebuild a great wall. And as soon as the work began, the critics showed up. Two men mocked him and tried to pull him away with endless meetings and distractions. Nehemiah's response is unforgettable. He said, "I am doing a great work and cannot come down." That is often the wisest response in suffering. Don't stare at the problem. Stay focused on the work of your hands.

Second, the knees. Knees represent stability. Weak knees wobble. They buckle under pressure. And suffering has a way of making even strong believers feel unsteady. So what do we do? We steady ourselves with the tools God has already given us. We stay on our knees in prayer. We stay in the Scriptures so we can stand on the promises of God. We stay in conversation with the saints so we don't lose heart. God never intended for injured people to walk alone. Sometimes you walk with help. Sometimes you walk with crutches. But you walk together. These are not signs of weakness. They are gifts of grace.

Third, the feet. Feet represent direction. Daily decisions. Next steps. When the writer says to make straight paths for your feet, he is calling us to stay on the straight and narrow. Don't envy the lives of unbelievers and reach for the remedies they use. Lust. Addiction. Affairs. Escape. Say no to the ways of the world and s

And when you do, something beautiful happens. The writer says the injury does not worsen. There are no dislocations. No additional damage. Instead, there is healing. You don't just survive the season. You don't just limp across the finish line. You come through stronger than before.

These are the three key things to think about when you're enduring what feels like discipline.

It confirms our identity, serves our good, and calls for a strong response.

Now, with the remainder of my time, I'd like to answer three questions that rise from the text.

**A Seasoned Christian Asks:**

**My “suffering assignment” has been dragging on for years. How do I keep from resenting God when nothing seems to change?**

That is an honest question. A life with Christ eventually brings long suffering, and self-pity is always waiting nearby.

Holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl described the mental breakdown that he saw in some of the men stuck in WW2. As the war went on and on, Frankl observed some simply give in and give up. They lost hope.

One of the signs was a cigarette.

In the camps, cigarettes were rare and precious. If a prisoner found one, he would often save it for a special day. It gave him something to look forward to, a future moment, however small. But Frankl noticed that if a man rolled over in his bunk in the morning and casually lit a cigarette, it was a bad sign:

**When we saw a comrade smoking his own cigarettes, we knew he had given up faith in his strength to carry on, and, once lost, the will to live seldom returned.**

**–Victor Frankl, holocaust survivor**

So what was the better way? Frankl said survival depended on refusing to let the mind descend into self-pity. He had to remind himself daily that the end of his story may mean nothing more than to suffer bravely, but he would accept that challenge. He mustered bravery even on the days that were brutal and repetitive.

That insight has deep parallels in Scripture.

The Bible never promises short seasons of suffering. In fact, it prepares us for long ones. The psalmist says, “Why are you cast down, O my soul? Hope in God.” Isaiah tells us that those who wait for the Lord will renew their strength, and the waiting sometimes feels too lone.

So how do you keep your heart soft when the assignment drags on?

You keep believing that God is at work even when nothing seems to change. To suffer bravely is best way to prove one’s pure faith in God.

**A Good-hearted Skeptic Asks:**

**How can God be a loving Father when He allows innocent children to be wounded?**

There are moments when I have wondered the same thing. Especially when innocent children are the ones who suffer. There is no quick answer that makes that pain disappear.

The Bible itself does not shy away from this tension. Even after Jesus was born, violence still came. In Matthew's Gospel, Herod the Great, paranoid about losing his throne, ordered the massacre of little boys in Bethlehem. If the Messiah was among them, he wanted the threat eliminated. And a multitude of innocent children were killed. We are left asking the same question you are asking now. Why didn't God stop it?

The honest answer is that we don't know. And we won't know on this side of heaven.

The Apostle Paul the Apostle, a man who suffered deeply for his faith, admitted as much. He wrote, "Now we see through a glass dimly, but then face to face." Even Paul acknowledged limits to human understanding. A big part of the Christian life is accepting that there are some things God has not chosen to explain to us.

That does not mean the questions are wrong. It means we are finite.

Faith, at its core, is not about having every answer. It is about deciding what you will do with the life you have been given while those questions remain unresolved. I cannot spend my entire life wondering why God allowed this or that tragedy. I am called to finish my race, to remain faithful to the assignment God has given me, and to trust Him even when understanding runs out.

That longing for answers is something we all feel. Years ago, a book surfaced that caused quite a stir and sold a bajillion copies. It was called *The Shack*. The book opens with a dad who has taken his children camping, and when he wasn't looking, a child is kidnapped and found dead in a shack in the woods. One day, he gets a note in his mailbox—an invitation from a stranger named Papa, to meet him at this shack. He goes there to find answers to what has happened to his child. And as you might guess, it is God who invites him there, to bring healing to his pain.

At some point in life, we all have this intense desire to go to the shack, to finally get some answers on why this thing was allowed to happen. That's why the book sold so many copies--we all feel it. We all have to wrestle with it.

Scripture shows us that this struggle is not new. Job asked God why. David cried out in the Psalms. The prophets lamented. And yet Job ultimately arrived at a place of surrender, saying, "Though He slay me, yet I will trust Him."

Part of the journey of faith is realizing that I may never know why God allowed certain things. But I do know this: He put me on this earth for a purpose. My calling is not to

unravel every mystery, but to live faithfully, to love deeply, and walk humbly all the way to the end. And sometimes, trusting God means holding unanswered questions in open hands and still choosing to follow Him.

**A Student Asks:**

**How do I “make straight paths” for myself when my friend group is steering me toward the ditch?**

My answer here may surprise you.

Often, the best way to respond to temptation is not to stand your ground and argue with it. The best response is simply to turn and run. Scripture never assumes you are strong enough to linger near temptation without consequences. In fact, it assumes the opposite. Get away from the forbidden fruit so that you can't bite it!

This truth is beautifully modeled in the story of Joseph in Genesis. While Joseph's master Potiphar was away, Potiphar's wife repeatedly tried to seduce him. Joseph understood something crucial. If he stayed in that situation long enough, he would eventually cave. And if he did, the consequences would be devastating.

So when the moment came, Joseph didn't try to talk her out of it and he didn't test his willpower. Scripture says he ran. He bolted out of the room so fast that she grabbed his garment and tore part of it away. Joseph would rather lose his reputation, his comfort, even his coat, than lose his integrity.

That's what making straight paths looks like.

Sometimes obedience is not heroic. It's not dramatic. It's simply getting out of the room. Logging off. Leaving the party. Changing your seat. Ending the conversation. Removing yourself from the environment where temptation thrives.

Straight paths are not about proving how strong you are. They are about arranging your life so you don't have to rely on strength you don't yet have.

The Bible says:

**Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. James 4:7**

Often the way we resist is by refusing proximity. You can't fight temptation if you keep hanging out where it lives.

So don't be embarrassed to run. Running is not weakness. In Scripture, it is wisdom.

In college, my friends all decided one night to meet up and do something “crazy.” There was a train that passed through the town and rumor had it, you could hop on this train at a certain location without anyone being aware. You could climb to the top of this train and ride it 50 miles to a nearby city. It was highly illegal. But all my friends were dressing in black clothes and meeting up at midnight for this wild adventure. I put on my black clothes, showed up on the scene, and there was this voice in me saying the whole time—Don’t do this. Don’t do this.

As the group gathered, I just said, “Guys, I’m out. I gotta go.” I turned around and went home. They hopped that train that night, and they had stories to tell, but I never felt envious because I did what I sensed was right. That’s the key, and the hardest part—to be your own person, and to learn to listen to the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes, turning around and going home is the thing that makes God smile.

As we close, what is the call to action today? As we move into our time of invitation and intercessory prayer, what types of people should respond today?

### **Come to the Altar**

- **If you wrestle with unforgiveness toward your father or mother.**

Certainly this passage brings pain to the surface for those who grew up under a legalist father or a perfectionistic mother or some other parental problem. It is hard to escape the traumas of childhood but perhaps today the Lord is calling you to come to this altar and seek His face in getting peace.

- **If you’ve been doubting the goodness of God because you can’t get answers.**

You are not alone if you wrestle with God about injustices that have happened in your past. The book of Job makes it clear that its ok to be honest with God about the unanswered mysteries of your life, but it’s not ok to resent God for withholding information. We are creatures, not Creator. We were not meant to know everything.

- **If you sense you’ve been under God’s discipline, and need prayer to discern what to do.**

If you sense that the Lord has made your life more difficult, that He’s putting you through a fire to refine you, then come and allow someone to pray for you. Perhaps

you've never given your life to the Lord, never moved forward in public baptism. Today's the day.

If you want to receive the Gospel, here's what it is:

What the Bible calls being saved is not a self-cleaning process. It's not you finally getting your act together. To be saved is the opposite, in fact. It's surrender. Admitting once and for all, that the gap between you and God can never be bridged by you. But **the cross of Jesus Christ has bridged that gap**, making it possible for you and God to be reconciled.

But you say, I've got to beat this battle with addiction first. No.

But I've got to make things right with other people. Not yet.

But I've got to become a better version of me before God could ever love me.

Absolutely not.

Scripture says that we will be able to love when we live under the realization that He first loved us. The steps in building a relationship with God are these: to surrender your life to Him, to be baptized in the presence of your new spiritual family, and to become an active part of body of Christ. Jesus is the head, we are the body.

I want to pray for those of you ready to accept Christ, and then we'll have our call to the altar.