No One Likes It But Everyone Needs It

How Is God Treating You?

Years ago I came to a stop sign. It was early in the morning on the fourth of July, the day before my birthday. I was just a block away from where I worked. Rather than coming to a complete stop, I tapped my brake and went through the intersection. To my great joy and pleasure, a police officer was on the other side of the street and saw what I did. He believed it was his job to stop me and give me a ticket. No mercy because it was a holiday or almost my birthday. No concern that I would be upset with him for giving me a ticket. Not a bit of guilt that he was hurting my feelings. He did wish me a happy birthday after I got the ticket but that did not assuage my feelings of anger and frustration that I was being disciplined by the long arm of the law. I had no recourse but to accept the discipline and continue my day. I must admit though that I was much more careful from that time forward to come to a complete stop at stop signs. Do you like being disciplined? I bet you don't. Do mothers like disciplining their young children? Of course not. At least not most of them. Do dads enjoy punishing their kids? Probably not. How hard is it for a grandparent to discipline his or her grandchildren? Do supervisors enjoy disciplining those who work for them? Are students happy about getting failing grades because they didn't put enough effort into their schoolwork? Does anyone like to give out or receive discipline? Probably not many of us like it on either count. That is why it is hard for us to hear that God Himself disciplines you and me. Does it bother Him to discipline us when He loves us so much? Does He ever want to just let our sins slide when we disobey Him? The Bible makes it clear though and we must face it squarely. God disciplines the disobedient. That Is our big idea.

Here on Father's Day there is an odd account of a father and his sons described in the Bible, one you would not expect except the Scriptures provide the facts of history, even if they don't make sense to us. Let me share the text with you. **When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.** (1 Sameul 8: 1-3 NIV) Samuel, the priest and judge was one of the godliest leaders the nation Israel ever had, and it is strange indeed that his sons, when they took over some of his responsibilities were so wicked. Samuel's predecessor, Eli, had sons even worse than Samuel. This is what the Bible says of them and why they were as they were. **…his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them.** (1 Samuel 3: 13 NIV) It is clear, when you read the Bible that God is not that way with us. He disciplines us when we act out, when we rebel against His rules of life. The book of Hebrews, written by the Apostle Paul says this of God. **In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."** (Hebrews 12: 4-6 NIV)

There is a mysterious work God does in each of those who have received from Him eternal life. It is discipline; the teaching of holy behavior through tough and trying circumstances. Put another way, God disciplines the disobedient. Why? Because he loves them. We often become oblivious to the damage sin causes us. It wrecks our personality, our relationships and our lives with God but to be honest, many don't care. But God does. Out of love for us, He disciplines us to stop the sinning. When the Lord ordered Moses to speak to a rock so that a miraculous flood of water would pour from it and quench the thirst of the millions of Israelites in the desert, Moses struck it instead. **Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.** (Numbers 20: 11 NIV) If God never responded to this act of disobedience, Moses might notr have thought twice about his sin. He was angry at the people for demanding he produce drinking water for them and probably still grieving the death of his sister who had helped save his life so long ago but God did not excuse Moses' behavior. Instead, the Lord told Moses he would not be allowed to cross into the Promised Land with the rest of the Israelites and God never let him despite Moses begging God to relent. God disciplines the disobedient, even great men like Moses.

Before she died, Moses' sister Miriam rebelled against God and the leadership of her brother Moses. The Lord as a result struck Miriam with leprosy and although God took if from her after Moses pleaded for her life, God still forced her to live outside the camp for seven days. God disciplines the disobedient. Something similar happened with John the Baptist's father. When Zecharaiah, an old man who often begged God for a son, finally was told by the Lord that he and his elderly wife Elizabeth would in fact have a son, Zechariah didn't believe the angel Gabriel. **Zechariah asked**

the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." (Luke 1: 18 NIV) The Lord, as a result of the old man's lack of faith, made him unable to speak until the day that promised baby was born. For nine long months, Zechariah had to live with the humiliation of being unable to speak. Even John the Baptist's father was disciplined, who God believed was the right man to be the dad for the great prophet who would announce the coming of Jesus.

In one of the strangest accounts found in the Bible, a prophet was sent by the Lord to confront the king of Israel. God told him specifically what to say to the king and then to return a different way from how he came from Judah without eating anything first. The text calls him a man of God and he did exactly what the Lord told him to do. He went to Israel and King Jeroboam and gave him the prophecy. When the king invited the prophet to stay a while and eat dinner and he would give him a gift, the prophet refused. **But the man of God answered the king, "Even if you were to give me half your possessions, I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water here. For I was commanded by the word of the Lord: 'You must not eat bread or drink water or return by the way you came.'" So he took another road and did not return by the way he had come to Bethel.** (1 Kings 13: 8-10 NIV) However, another prophet who was from Israel, heard that the man of God was leaving Israel to head for Judah so he got on a donkey and caught up with the man of God as he was on his way. Weirdly, the prophet of Israel lied and told the prophet from Judah that the Lord had told him to in fact go to the home of the prophet of Israel and eat with him. The man of God believed the prophet of Israel and went back with him to his home. While they were eating is when it got strange. **While they were sitting at the table, the word of the Lord came to the old prophet who had brought him back. He cried out to the man of God who had come from Judah, "This is what the Lord says: 'You have defied the word of the Lord and have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you. You came back and ate bread and drank water in the place where he told you not to eat or drink. Therefore your body will not be buried in the tomb of your fathers.'"** (1 Kings 13: 20-22 NIV) And that is what happened. The man of God, on his return to Judah was killed by a lion.

Even great, godly, faithful men and women, when they disobey the Lord, are disciplined by Him. God disciplines the disobedient. God is exceedingly serious about you becoming holy and thoroughly devoted to Him. He wants to prepare you for a greater role in God's kingdom and for that to happen, He must discipline you when you are disobedient. He is maturing your personality for heaven so that you will be the best possible dad, or mom, or classmate or teammate you can be and that is priority one for God. This week, take some time at different parts of the day and ask God to show you if there is anything in you that needs correcting, needs to be made right. Have you disobeyed God? Is there something you need to do to be aligned with the commands of Scripture, with the ways of godliness? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you get things right. If you are about to disobey God, hold up the stop sign and refuse to put yourself in the position of God having to discipline you. Why wait for God to discipline you? Fix it before it becomes a problem. You can start a trend toward holiness in your family and at your workplace if you take the time this week to make sure obeying God is your top priority no matter what!