

Hebrews 12 (10-11) – God’s Plan for Your More

People are always looking for more. In most every part of life. And this includes Christians and their spiritual lives. We want more knowledge, more wisdom, more power, more feeling, more fire, more focus. We want to grow. And today, I want to answer the question, “How can I grow in obedience?”

Overcoming temptations can be tough. And temptation often intensifies when God is refining you. So, when you feel the heat of God’s refining fire, you want something to comfort you, to make your suffering more bearable, and you might be tempted to turn to idols. What do I mean by that? I mean that you look to something other than God to meet your needs, like your felt need for comfort, or thinking you deserve to indulge yourself when you’re suffering. It might make you feel better, but it won’t help you grow.

An idol of comfort or coping doesn’t have to be some obvious addiction, cherished indulgence, or secret sin. It can be as simple as avoiding your prayer life, fellowship, church meetings, Bible reading, and godly things. Instead, you’re spending more time reading or watching other things, entertaining yourself more than usual, leaning heavily into work, trying to solve everyone else’s problems, anything that makes more time for you and your whatever, and less time for you and Jesus.

You may even do more *for* God, and still be avoiding your relationship *with* God. You may be growing, but not in godliness.

Maybe you know it’s not right. But you don’t know how to be more obedient, beyond all the things you’ve tried before.

What is the “answer” when it comes to the question of growing in obedience? Well, the first thing we try is sheer willpower. And grace isn’t opposed to effort, and holiness can be hard work. So, willpower is part of your answer. But it isn’t the whole answer. Willpower will never be enough. Because God has a design for your development that includes more.

So, you think that you need to find some special motivation. You need some wind in your sails, so that you don't get worn out rowing your boat so hard. And you think of increasing your service and worship with the people of God. You also focus on the word of God, and meditate on the rewards of God. And this is also part of your answer.

But while godly pleasures and eternal treasures are biblically proper motivations, even these good things can fail you as far as keeping you obedient. The wind doesn't seem to help you at times, especially in the stormy seas of suffering.

So then, you might turn more earnestly to prayer. You hope and pray for some sort of experience that will "zap" you into a sort of automatic faithfulness. You want more. And in accord with that, you search for some missing key to denying yourself and walking in the Spirit.

Maybe it's a conference, or some other concert or event, some different doctrine, or new church, or way of teaching, or person teaching. It's just something you weren't doing before. Maybe you try to find out what others who seem to be "on fire" are doing. Maybe you go back to something you did before. And maybe you get a certain "spark," and you might seem to have found your answer for a while.

But eventually it's not enough, and you go on the hunt for "more." Again. And again. And again. As if your spiritual life is supposed to go from one "high" to another. Our text today proves it isn't.

So, maybe you finally realize the truth. You're just going around in circles, and you're still the same. Or worse. And you think you've "tried everything." You grow increasingly discouraged and dissatisfied. Perhaps even angry and bitter and prideful against people. Things don't seem to be getting better, in your daily life, your plans, and your spiritual situation. You aren't too happy. And you don't feel holy. And you just can't escape the feeling that there must be something "more."

And there is. There is something more. Something that God does. But you might have missed it, because it's not the more you're looking for.

God's plan for your more is right here in this passage. But people don't understand what it is. And not learning the Hebrews 12 way of more is why people leave good churches, and good people, because they haven't understood the good way of God. So, they look for other, greener pastures. But wherever you go, if you are truly God's child, you will eventually run into the same problem. And that problem is God. Jesus is the Great Shepherd, and we are the sheep of his pasture. Our passage in Hebrews 12 presents a necessary and unavoidable plan of God.

And that plan is learning to suffer well. And growing in God's grace because of it. Instead of being disobedient. You might think that you can avoid this process, if you just have enough faith, or if you are obedient enough in other ways. You might think there is some other way that will get you where you want to be. As if you can "do enough" so you don't have to undergo any disciplinary correction. As if God doesn't discipline those who are already doing well. As if God doesn't prune every branch that bears fruit, so that it will bear more fruit (John 15:2). As if God is only speaking to those who mess up and need a spanking, and that doesn't have to be you.

Lots of people think that discipline is only for the disobedient. But vs.6 says otherwise, and vs.7-8 make the point clear. When it comes to God's training program, all have participated in it (vs.8). But not all have been trained by it (vs.11). If you don't learn this, in its pure, raw form, you are indeed missing out on a big part of your answer. And you disobey God's design.

Weightlifters say, "no pain, no gain." But you can also have pain, and still have no gain. Suffering does not automatically make you holy. You must exercise faith and learn to be disciplined by the suffering in order to grow in your holiness. You learn what it is like in that situation, to deny that temptation. You must be trained to be holy. In other words, you must learn what obedience is like through your suffering, as Jesus did.

Hebrews 5:8 says that Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered. Hebrews 5:9 says Jesus was made perfect by this suffering. Now, we know that Jesus was already perfect, and perfectly obedient. Jesus is God, but he had to learn what it was like to overcome temptation as a human by being trained through suffering. He became a perfect sacrifice. Even if you've been doing well in your sanctified life, you still need training. Jesus never needed to repent. But you must learn how to keep turning to God.

Now for these Hebrews in that day, the suffering they were having to go through was about being persecuted for their faith. And when the going got tough, some people who started out with Jesus had turned back to the easier and popular ways, rather than follow the true faith. So, these Hebrews were being warned that if they turned back now, they would never turn right again. The message was that Jesus was superior to all that old way of religion. And you can't be a Christian without fully embracing Jesus. If you think that you can compromise for the sake of comfort, you are deceived. And when Hebrews talks about suffering, this is not only about persecution, it is about how God develops your Christian life and testimony.

This is the very situation we are in today. This applies to you. There are a growing number of professing Christians who believe and teach that you don't have to suffer. That it is just the attack of the devil, or people, or a lack of faith, or that God doesn't use suffering in the Christian's life, and that any suffering you have is just your fault for sin. And you know what? We do need faith, and we are under attack, and there are consequences for sin. But God has always used suffering in the life of believers. In fact, our text today proves that God plans to use suffering whether you are at fault or not. And faith is not a way out of all suffering, faith is what helps you to suffer well. And THAT is the aim of Hebrews: trust Jesus, and learn to suffer well.

Remember this: the book of Hebrews was not trying to discourage people by saying they have to suffer. It is encouraging believers by saying that their suffering is purposed and superintended by God for their good. Even when people mean things for your bad, God means them for your good.

Now, when certain people hear about discipline and chastisement, and relating that to fathers, they might feel uneasy about it. They are sensitive to such topics, because they have known or had an abusive parent, or family member, or relative. Or perhaps they were abused by another adult or someone else. It is understandable why they might feel this way. These things can stay etched in your memory for a lifetime.

Let this text help you with the truth of God as your Heavenly Father. He isn't like your earthly father, if you had a bad one, or even if you had a good one, or even if you didn't have one. Our Heavenly Father is perfectly good. He is going to do things right, and make things right. When you think of his discipline, or other such things you might be sensitive to, you need to remember who God is. What his character is like. He is not like us. He is perfect. And what he does is out of his love and always for our good. This passage of scripture is not simply pointing to the similarity between earthly fathers and our Heavenly Father. It is pointing to the differences. God has better motives and better plans than any dad, good, bad, or absent.

So yes, some people have bad dads who abused them. But instead of filtering these words about God through your experience, consider the character of God. You can transcend those bad experiences and know that God is good. And this passage is showing you why he is good.

This is not talking about God being harsh with you. This is talking about God training you and being helpful to you. Discipline hurts, but God is not doing this out of anger, the text is clear that he does this out of love. God is perfect, and he can't do it wrong, because he isn't a flawed human being. God is God. And this text is telling you that God does his discipline for better reasons, and greater results, than our earthly fathers could ever deliver, even if they wanted to. God's training is to help your faith flourish not flounder.

Training is tough. Before you run that marathon, you'll need to run many hundreds of miles before you can run 26.2 miles at once. Before you set your bench press record, you'll need to approach that weight by lifting lots of

weight in preparation. Before you jump your highest, you'll practice jumping and learning to jump and stretching and getting your muscles ready, and all of that, before you reach your goal. Any athletic endeavor requires discipline. Any goal in life requires discipline. And holiness requires discipline. Even if you're doing good, you still have to train.

And God's training method is not something you can skip out on. God wants you to make the most of it. You don't have to go looking for God's discipline, it is coming for you. But why doesn't it work for some Christians? Well, for many, it's not the more they're looking for. But it is the more that you need. And it is coming to all Christians. What you do with it is up to you. When it comes to God's training program, all have participated in it (vs.8), but not all have been trained by it (vs.11). You don't just grit your teeth and bear it. You grow with God and bear fruit.

Now, let's briefly break down vs.10-11, and see God's plan unfold.

God's plan is good (*he disciplines us for our good*). You might think you need to figure out if your suffering is due to God's plan of discipline, or just the devil attacking you, or other people messing around, or you messing up. But you don't have to figure it out. You just need to have trust in God that he wants to use this suffering to produce a peaceful righteousness in you.

God's plan is godliness (*that we may share his holiness*). Think about what is being said here. God wants to give you more, so much more that you will share in his character. God wants you to share in his eternal nature in a practical way. When God speaks of holiness for you, this isn't some boring, joyless, no fun kind of life. It is a powerful, patient, peaceful life that finds its pleasure in the presence of God. This is not some mere hype that makes you hyper but it goes away. No, this is living in it, whether things are exciting or not. Whether things are going well or not. If you ever taste this, you will want this. This is the more your born-again soul is looking for. This is what eternity will be fully like. Fully set apart. And fully obedient from the heart.

You won't have a perfect fullness now. But you can have a measure of it now. This is what God is telling you through this text.

God's plan starts with pain (*For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant*). Training is painful. Even if you know you've got to be exercising, and even when you know it's helping, and even when you are joyful in the fact that you know God is working you out. The text says that as you are going through the process, *all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant*. But that pain is part of a plan, a plan with a purpose.

God's plan leads to peace (*but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness*). The fruit of righteousness is enjoyed in peace after the conflict; when you have been trained by it, when you have exercised your faith and it has strengthened. Isaiah 32:17 – *And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.*

1 Peter 4:1-2 applies here – *Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.* Learning to suffer well is the answer to overcoming temptation, and growing in obedience.

God's plan must be trusted, and acted upon (*to those who have been trained by it*). You must be trained by this suffering if you want to enjoy *the peaceful fruit of righteousness*. So, you must have patience with the process. Then you will grow in God's grace in a way you can't do otherwise. And you'll trust God in a deeper way when the next round of discipline comes. You're learning how God's plan works. And you become a witness to how God develops his children through discipline. You've gone from temptation to training to testimony. Your life will teach those who are willing to learn.

Discipline is the destiny of every disciple. What you do with it is up to you. Faith follows God's plan. Learn to suffer well, and you'll become more like Jesus. That's the more all Christians should be looking for.