

# Hebrews 12:4-11 New International Version (NIV)

God Disciplines His Children

4 In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline,  
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

6 because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”[a]

7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? 8 If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! 10 They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Bleeding, sweating, gasping, he lies on the floor. He’s been shot, and his life is ebbing away. It’s the final scene in what is probably Clint Eastwood’s darkest western, a movie where there is no hero, where even the bad guy thinks he’s the good guy. The sheriff has brought peace to a town; people fear and respect him. And now he’s been shot. As the sheriff’s lying there, dying, he looks up at Eastwood, who pulled the trigger, and he growls: “I don’t deserve this... to die like this!” And Eastwood looks down at him and says: “Deserve’s got nothing to do with it.”

That’s the heart of this section from Hebrews: “Deserve’s got nothing to do with it.” Oh, the Hebrew Christians hadn’t been shot or killed... yet. But it might come to that. They were in a tough position. They were suffering persecution at the hands of the government. This letter was written to Jewish Christians who lived in all likelihood in the city of Rome. During the infamous persecution of Nero. The Romans tolerated Judaism – Jews were free to carry out their religion in the Roman Empire. But the Christian faith was not. They were forbidden to worship Christ, forbidden to gather with other Christians. And they received heavy punishment when they did. Houses confiscated, businesses impounded. That’s what was happening to the Hebrew Christians. Not to the Jews! Only to the Christians. So, many Hebrew Christians were heavily tempted to pass themselves off as Jews to escape

the pressure. To give up their faith. In the face of this relentless persecution, occasional imprisonment, loss of income, loss of property, and growing threat to life and limb, the Hebrew Christians were saying: "What did we do wrong? Why is God doing this to us? What did we do to deserve this?" But - "Deserve's got nothing to do with it."

The Word of God says to them: "You have forgotten what God told you." And then it quotes from Pro 3:11f (written 1000 years before!) "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

When the government suppressed their faith, in the face of the brutal confiscation of property and destruction of livelihood, the Hebrew Christians said: God is punishing us. To them, the hardship was a sign of God's anger and displeasure, and so they wanted to know what they had done to deserve all this. But "Deserve's got nothing to do with it." It did not occur to them to see all this hardship as something positive. That suffering can be positive? We in the faith who hear these words today must know that what is said here about discipline refers first and foremost to suffering caused by persecution. And no society is immune against persecution. This Word of God applies to persecuted Christians today. But it also contains deep truth and profound wisdom for all suffering that Christians endure. For Christians, all forms of suffering are a test of your faith. Does it occur to us to ever see suffering as something positive?

In his book "The Problem of Pain", CS Lewis writes: "Everyone who has watched gluttons shovelling down the most exquisite foods as if they did not know what they were eating will admit that we can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world." That means that even though many people ignore what God is telling them in the many daily blessings of health and wealth, Pain and suffering will always get their attention. Pain and suffering play an important role in the way God speaks to people, and it's not only negative.

Have you considered that your suffering might be playing a positive role in your life? To illustrate that, Scripture says our relationship with God is like that of a son with his father. Every loving father, says the Bible, disciplines his son. There is a place for discipline in love. Letting your children get away with bad behavior is not love. Failure to give a child boundaries and guidance is not love. When it comes to parenting styles, Scripture unequivocally equates discipline with love. Discipline in the sense of boundaries, of punishment for doing wrong, and of correction and shaping the child when it needs to grow.

So it is with our heavenly Father and you. When you experience suffering, it does not happen without your Father's knowledge and consent. But here's the point: That suffering is not proof of God's anger. It is proof of His love. We have grown up in a time of entitlement, where we think we are entitled to success, entitled to pleasure, entitled to an easy life and constant gratification. That it's our right. That we deserve it. But "Deserve's got nothing to do with it." We are not entitled to a pain-free, care-free life. The Christian life is the life under the cross. Christ promised us God's blessing – but he never promised us an easy life. On the contrary! Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). If your Father didn't love you, He wouldn't discipline you. If He never disciplined you, then you'd be illegitimate and not His son. When you suffer, your Father is proving that He loves you, that you are His child.

My parents bought their first house when I was around 9 yrs old. The yard needed a lot of work. The grass was growing up the wall. One afternoon my dad called us four boys and put grass shears in our hand and assigned to each of us a stretch of wall. I didn't feel like clipping grass. I complained. I said "The grass makes my skin itch!" Dad said: "I've told you to cut; just go and cut." I kept on whining. Dad was getting irritated. "His section is shorter than mine!" "Right," said Dad, "Now you'll cut half of his, too." "But Dad!" "You keep complaining, you'll get even more." "That's not fair!" I said. "Ok, you'll cut half of your youngest brother's, too." I protested. Well, my youngest brothers ended up doing nothing, and I had to do all of theirs. They got off. I got the message. My dad wanted to instill a work-ethic in me. I wanted to goof off. I didn't necessarily "deserve" cutting all that grass. But I needed to. And my dad knew that. He was shaping my character. In love, he disciplined me. And in future, I learned to respect him and honor what he said. If we honor our human fathers and respect them, even though they are not always perfect, then how much more should we not learn to respect the Father of our life, who always gives us the

discipline we need? Our Father in heaven does not make mistakes. When He disciplines us, we honor Him.

One man tells the story of his childhood. As a small boy, he had been consistently late for dinner. One particular day his parents had warned him to be on time, but he arrived later than ever. He found his parents already seated at the table, about to start eating. Quickly he sat at his place, then noticed what was set before him – a piece of bread and a glass of water. There was silence as he sat staring at his plate, crushed. Suddenly he saw his father's hand reach over, pick up his plate and set it before himself. Then his dad put his own full plate in front of his son, smiling warmly as he made the exchange. When the boy became a man, he said, "All my life I've known what God was like by what my father did that night." No, "Deserve's got nothing to do with it." God's Law condemns us. We are all guilty. We deserve nothing but His anger. But our Father chooses to unleash all His anger on His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Who deserved everything but. The punishment for your sin and mine is placed on Jesus. When you were baptized, your Father switched the bowls, and the bowl of His anger is emptied by Christ on the cross, while you and I receive the fullness of the Father's love. "Deserve's got nothing to do with it." It's all love.

If our loving Father then, who is all-wise and all-knowing, deems it necessary for us to be shaped and corrected by hardship – which is temporary! – why should we not submit in faith? It's painful, we say, it hurts. Yes, hardship hurts. Suffering is not pleasant. But your Father never leaves your side. He will not burden you with more than you can bear. And while His discipline is painful, it has a purpose. It corrects you and shapes you to be more like Christ. You share in his suffering. You will also share in his glory. Suffering shapes you to share more and more the holiness of God, in the way you are, and therefore also in the way you think and act and speak. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. The end result when a Christian suffers in faith and humble submission is a peaceful conscience and a righteous heart. May the Holy Spirit continue to encourage and comfort us, that in suffering we would not give up our faith, but rather submit, and honor God, and as disciplined disciples learn to say: "Thank you, Father, for my hurting." Amen.

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