



Let's start with a little review. Do you remember the three types of discipline that the Lord uses that I gave you last Sunday? They are: formative discipline, corrective discipline and preventative discipline. God intends that every trial become a powerful teaching tool in our lives. Every hardship is forming character in us, correcting faults in us or preventing sins by us. Hardships should make us continually ask questions like: what do you want me to learn? What sin do I need to repent of? Which direction do you want me to go?

We should never say, "This hardship would be a lot easier if I knew the reason behind the trial?" As we saw last week, we always know the reason for trials and suffering. Every trial is given to help us develop perseverance. Every hardship is given to us so that we are once again reminded that we are weak and God is strong—that his strength can *only* be displayed in our weakness. Every bit of suffering is ours, as Paul said earlier in this letter, in order to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us (2 Co 4:7). But many of you will not be satisfied with these kinds of answers because you want to know the "real reason." You want to know precisely why this very thing is happening to you at this very moment. You want specifics, you want details.

It's kind of like what happens when you hear a really good rumor. The first thing you do is sit the person down who told you the rumor and say to him or her, "Tell me everything you know. Give me some details, man!" (But that would be gossip and we would never do that, right?) We have a strong desire to know the fine details of the reasons for our trials. We believe that if we knew the reason, it would help us make sense of the difficulty. We would be more content if we knew the actual reason. Let me explain why we seem to be desperate for specific answers to our hardships. What we are seeking after is usually called God's secret will. The Bible is very clear in teaching that God is sovereign over every particle of dust and every sub-atomic particle and whatever else lies below sub-atomic particles. "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it." God has a sovereign plan for everything and everyone. God's plan for you as an individual is essentially a secret plan. He knows the plan and you do not. Our entire lives then is a process by which he slowly and in his own timing, reveals his secret plan for your life.

When most Christians talk about God's will, we are usually thinking in categories that fit into God's secret will. This is true whether we would like to know which person we are supposed to

marry or the reason behind our suffering. Both of these answers are part of God's secret will. There is only one problem in our quest to know God's secret will for our lives, and it is this—it tends to detract from God's revealed will in our lives. God's revealed will comes from Scripture and Scripture alone. Let me give you an example that will highlight the differences. Let's take the example of who you are supposed to choose for a lifetime mate. Next to your decision to follow Christ, this is the most important decision you will ever make. It is huge. You should be concerned about it. You should pray about it and God in his mercy will give you bits of information to lead you in the right direction.

But in the end, how do you know if you are marrying the right person? Well, first of all, you need to seek out God's revealed will in this decision. Is the person to whom you are attracted and considering lifelong matrimony a genuine believer or not? I have heard some of the wackiest, wishy-washy and far out answers to this question that you could imagine. "Well, I know that Tom is a Christian because he says that he is a Christian." So does 70% of Americans. "Well, I know that Sally is a Christian because she goes to church every week." Big deal. I know this dog that goes to church every week and I wouldn't recommend asking for the dog's paw in marriage. There is much more to finding a Godly Christian husband or wife and all that you need to know is in the revealed will of God contained in the Word of God.

Will the Bible tell you the name of the person you are supposed to marry? I had a couple tell me they wanted me to marry them on April 15 because when they opened the Bible and pointed their finger it landed on chapter four, verse fifteen—4/15. No, the Bible will not tell you who you are supposed to marry. In fact, as I said in the Genesis series, I don't believe that there is only one person out there for you and if you happen to miss that one person, you will be miserable for the rest of your life. I believe that when you consider all of the Biblical guidelines for choosing a Godly husband or wife that there can be many people whom you could marry. However, once you say "I do," then you can be certain that your husband or wife is the exact right person for you. And how do I know this? Because the revealed will of God instructs us in the lifelong commitment of a covenant marriage. Once you have entered into your covenant marriage, the revealed will of God tells us that this is the right person for you.

My point is that Christians too often get paralyzed in our search for the secret will of God. Who should we marry? Where should I go to school? Which job should I take? Which house should I buy? All of these are very important questions and we should certainly spend time thinking and praying about them. Furthermore, you can guess that I also believe that there are many possible answers to these questions. Like your marriage partner, I don't believe that God's will for your life is a small dot of truth and if you decided to attend the wrong school or choose the wrong career, you will have missed out on the perfect will of God and will live in utter misery every day for the next 70 years. However, if we spent most of our time and energy seeking the revealed will of God, then the so-called secret will of God will fall into place. Think about it. If you are praying fervently, building Godly character and searching the Scriptures with all your might, don't you think you will have a good handle on these bigger life decisions? Of course you will. But because we are so lazy we would rather that God just tell us the right decision so we can move forward.

I hope you can see how this understanding of God's will applies to trials and hardships. When we say that we want to know the reason for the difficulty we are suffering at a point in time, what we really want to know is God's secret will on the matter. I am saying that this is always the wrong place to start. We already know God's revealed will regarding why we all experience trials, most of which I shared in last week's message. First, we must remember that all trials happen because we live in a fallen world. All of these evil things will disappear forever in eternity. Second, we know that God uses these evil things like cancer, relational conflict and even death as a means of formative discipline, corrective discipline or preventative discipline. God is teaching us, training us and correcting us so that we will be more like him. "The testing of our faith develops perseverance so that we can be mature and complete, not lacking anything." He is using these hardships to destroy our self-sufficiency and pride, to show how weak we are so that his power can be displayed in our weakness. The revealed will of God again and again gives us multiple reasons for our suffering and trials. God also has a secret will which he may or may not reveal to you. I am not suggesting it is wrong to want to know this secret will of God, but it is wrong to seek it instead of seeking the revealed will of God. It is wrong if we are worried and concerned and feel that we can never be content unless we know this secret reason for our trials. We already know all that we need to know and if God in his mercy decides to tell us the hidden reason at some point, then we can rejoice in that knowledge. However, if he doesn't choose to tell us the secret reason, then it means that we do not need to know the secret reason. We can be content with the knowledge that God has a greater purpose for our difficulties and all of these purposes are revealed in His Word.

I should point out that something that was raised in our Life Group last week. The three types of discipline that God uses in our life—formative, corrective and preventative—are exclusively for the believer. Last Sunday I used Hebrews 12 as one example of corrective discipline.

<sup>5</sup> 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, <sup>6</sup> because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

<sup>7</sup> Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons.

God the Father lovingly disciplines us because we are his children. Among all of the other benefits, Godly discipline has the added benefit of reassuring us that we are sons and daughters of God. God does not offer formative, corrective or preventative discipline to the unbeliever precisely because they are not his children. Pain and suffering for the unbeliever has a very different and distinct purpose. Jesus explained this in Luke 13.

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

Sin, sickness and even death exist in this world because it is a broken and fallen world, but these evil things are signs to the unbeliever of the need to repent. Natural disasters like we have seen in the past few months—earthquakes, tsunamis and tornadoes—are with us to warn us of the coming judgment. Believers have nothing to fear at the judgment but unbelievers have

everything to fear at the judgment. This passage in Luke is so instructive because it also tells us that natural disasters are not necessarily thrust upon a city or country as a direct punishment for a particular sin. God may bring such specific punishment but it is most likely a result of the natural consequences of an earth that is groaning with the pains of sin which God uses to warn unbelievers of the coming judgment. This delay of judgment is itself, a form of mercy.

But as I have said before, we must be very careful with how we apply these truths. When it comes to pain and suffering, we have two basic responses—there is a pastoral response and a theological response. The pastoral response is necessary at the height of a person’s suffering and pain. For example, you don’t stroll into Joplin, Missouri hours after the tornado sucked the high school student through the sunroof of his parents SUV (did you hear about that awful story?)<sup>1</sup> and start preaching at them. Let’s see... Was your son saved? If he was, then it means that God was administering some sort of loving discipline to him. You’re his mother—are you a Christian. If you are not, then God is sending you a warning to repent or you will also perish. If you said such a thing, you would be giving this grieving family the theological response when what they need at that moment is a pastoral response. They need someone to sit with them and cry for a while. They need someone to come alongside them and help them through the tragedy. There will be a time to give them the theological answer. We should not be afraid of the theological answer because it is a Biblical answer, but we must be discerning as to the best time to give the best answers.

All of that was more or less a completion of last week’s message, but I do want to continue the theme of discipline, or as we will see, discipleship with the remainder of chapter twelve and chapter thirteen. Please turn to 2 Cor. 12:11.

*<sup>11</sup> I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the “super-apostles,” even though I am nothing. <sup>12</sup> The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance. <sup>13</sup> How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!*

*<sup>14</sup> Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. <sup>15</sup> So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less? <sup>16</sup> Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery! <sup>17</sup> Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent you? <sup>18</sup> I urged Titus to go to you and I sent our brother with him. Titus did not exploit you, did he? Did we not act in the same spirit and follow the same course?*

*<sup>19</sup> Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening. <sup>20</sup> For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. <sup>21</sup> I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.*

**13** *This will be my third visit to you. “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”<sup>a</sup> <sup>2</sup> I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, <sup>3</sup> since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. <sup>4</sup> For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God’s power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God’s power we will live with him to serve you.*

<sup>5</sup> *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? <sup>6</sup> And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. <sup>7</sup> Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. <sup>8</sup> For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. <sup>9</sup> We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection. <sup>10</sup> This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.*

In this last section of 2 Corinthians, we see the final words of the apostle Paul to this troubled church in Corinth. He spent more time with this church than any other church in the New Testament and as we will see, they still were mired in difficulties. What this last section reveals is Paul’s true heart for his people. Paul has the heart of a discipler. I am using the word disciple as a verb to indicate one who disciplines another person. That is probably not a word in your every day vocabulary so I want to show you how it fits with the three types of discipline that God uses with us.

The Greek word for discipline is *paideia*<sup>2</sup>. Remember that the Lord uses both formative and corrective discipline with us. He teaches and instructs us but he also corrects and rebukes us. This word for discipline can be used in all of these ways. It can be translated positively as teach, instruct and train or more negatively as punish and chastise, but it is all the same word.

The instructor who administer discipline in all of its forms—teaching, instructing, punishing and chastising—is called a *paideutes*.<sup>3</sup> Do you see the same root in these two words?

The child or learner who is instructed is called a *paidion*.<sup>4</sup> I can’t prove this but notice how similar this word is to “padawan” is Star Wars. They are spelled and sound nearly identical not to mention the fact that master and padawan have the exact same roles and instructor and learner. In fact you cannot be a padawan unless you have a Jedi master to instruct you in all things Jedi. Finally, the verb form of this word is *paideuo*<sup>5</sup>

If you put it all together, you can make the following sentence.

*The paideutes paideuos the paidion and this is called paideia.*

That makes very little sense to you but I wanted you to see how all of the words share the same root word. In English we would write the same sentence like this.

*The discipler disciplines the disciple and this is called discipleship.*

Or to make the meaning more obvious still we would say:

*The instructor teaches, instructs, trains, punishes and chastises the student and this process is called discipleship.*

However you say it, I want you how we arrive at this thing called discipleship. We throw the word discipleship around but we rarely take the time to define what it means and where it came from. For the next several weeks I want to walk you through a Biblical framework for discipleship and also show you how the ministries of our church are intended to help you in the discipleship process. Therefore, it is well worth our time to lay this foundation first.

Discipleship, therefore, is the process of spiritual growth. To grow in Christ-likeness requires that we engage in a process of discipleship and this process must include all of the positive and negative aspects of discipline and discipleship. It is safe to say that you cannot grow as a believer without a process of discipleship. Let me say that again so you catch it. You cannot grow as a believer without a process of discipleship. This is not to say that you must use a particular type of discipleship or a particular discipleship process. If you earnestly study the Scriptures and practice all that it says, this is a form of discipleship. You could in theory be discipled on your own on a deserted island without anyone or anything but the Bible and the Holy Spirit. The Bible and the Holy Spirit are the essential elements in spiritual growth, but the Lord has created us in such a way that discipleship is best accomplished in community. In other words, we need one another. You need me. I need you. We need to be disciples and learners at all times and we need people to disciple us and help us grow. Discipleship goes in these two directions—we are disciples and we need to disciple others. Discipleship moves in these two directions—to us and from us—and discipleship has two primary environments—the church and the family. The church must disciple its members and the family must disciple its members. So guess what, mom and dad? This means that you are the primary disciplers of your children.

Up until now I have been talking about discipline in terms of what God does for us through trials and hardships. Now that we have filled out the word discipline and discipleship, we can see even more clearly how formative, corrective and preventative discipline is all part of the discipleship process. God is our great teacher and discipler and he will use whatever he desires to make us more like him, including every last bit of pain and suffering that we experience. But that is only the tip of the iceberg. We need others to disciple us and we in turn need to disciple others. The

Paul was more than a discipler of the church in Corinth, but he was not less than this, so it is appropriate to use this term to describe his ministry with them. Almost anyone can teach a skill or facts to someone else, but it takes someone special to be able to do this in atmosphere of conflict. Try teaching people who don't want to learn. This is a little taste of what Paul experienced with the Corinthian believers. He was their spiritual father on earth but many of them rejected his love and authority. It is especially in this atmosphere of conflict that his heart as a discipler comes through so powerfully. I see four main methods he used to disciple these wayward Christians.

He had deep love for them. In 12:14 he wrote, *I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you.* They accused Paul because he did not take money from them to support his ministry. Can you imagine such a thing? Usually you would think just the opposite would be true—that a church would be upset because the minister wanted too much money. The

whole thing is quite absurd, but the point is that through all of their accusations, he loved them deeply. He went on to speak of this love. *So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well.* Not only was he not willing to take money from them, he spent his own money on their behalf. In 12:19 he proclaimed that *everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening* and in verse 21 he revealed that *I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented* (12.21)

Paul's role was to disciple the whole church, including those who did not like, who did not want his help. This is good groundwork for parents because our parenting often takes place in an environment where our kids don't like us at times and often don't want our help. It all starts with a heart of love.

In the next few weeks we will show you more clearly how to do this and how our church can help with this most viral process of discipling one another.

Rich Maurer  
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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2011/05/24/earlyshow/main20065618.shtml>

<sup>a</sup> Deut. 19:15

<sup>2</sup> παιδεία

<sup>3</sup> παιδευτής

<sup>4</sup> παιδίον

<sup>5</sup> παιδεύω