

## Day of Thanksgiving

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

If you look up the word *discipline* in today's dictionaries, you will find a definition that is stern or harsh. The most common wording I found was "to chastise or punish."

But if you look it up in the *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, you will find its original meaning. Here discipline is defined as: "Learning that molds character and enforces correct behavior."

The word discipline comes to us from the Latin *disciplina*, which means "instruction" or "training." Its verb form, *discere*, means "to learn." So, the word *discipline* implies education and training... self-control and determination... knowledge in a field of study... or even an orderly way of life.

Nothing about its original meaning suggests that it should be stern or harsh. In fact, the earliest Bible translators chose a related word, *disciple*, to represent the Greek word *mathētēs*—which means, "one who learns by following."

In Deuteronomy chapter eight, Moses is reminding the Children of Israel that they are to remember the Lord their God as they enter the Promised Land... and to give thanks for all that He has given them.

First, there was a price for them to pay, and a reward that followed: **The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do—[so] that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers.**

But there was also a lesson to be *learned*—a lesson from history—taught by God Himself: **And you shall remember—the whole way—that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness... that He might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart... whether you would keep His commandments or not.**

That lesson was what we call *discipline*—"learning that molds character and enforces correct behavior."

Remember all those times that you thought God had abandoned you? That He didn't care about you? That you were on your own? Times when the money ran short... the jobs were scarce... and famine or flood or sickness threatened to do you in?

This past year might have you thinking that God has forgotten... that He no longer cares... that you're on your own. But nothing could be further from the truth. God has not forgotten. He cares far more than you realize. And you are definitely not on your own.

If history can teach us anything, it is that God has been humbling us in 2020... testing us to know what is in our hearts... whether we will keep His commandments, or not. And there is always much to be thankful for in the lessons God teaches.

Moses says to us today: **Know then in your heart, that as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you.**

God has not been particularly stern or harsh this past year. He is not merely chastising and punishing us for all the wrongs that we've done. He is testing us to know what is in our hearts... to see whether we will keep His commandments, or not. He is molding our character and enforcing correct behavior within us.

As Proverbs 3 reminds us: **My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom He loves.** Or as chapter 13 teaches us: **Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.**

Remember Israel's history? How long Abraham had to wait for a son? How Isaac was asked to carry the very wood upon which he was to be sacrificed? How Jacob had to work for seven extra years to receive the woman he had asked for in marriage? How Joseph was sold into slavery, so that God could bless his family through him?

God was *disciplining* each of them for their good. He was molding their character and enforcing the correct behavior in them—so that He could use them to bless His people.

Remember how Moses hid in Midian for forty years before he was sent back to Egypt by God to lead His people to the Promised Land? And how it still took all ten plagues AND the crossing of the Red Sea to rid themselves of Pharaoh? How they wandered in the wilderness for forty long years, suffering one setback after another?

God was with them the whole way—*disciplining* them for their own good. He was molding their character and enforcing correct behavior within them—so that they could reach the Promised Land.

Now, as they prepare to enter the land of Canaan, Moses is reminding them once again: **[The Lord] humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know—that He might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every Word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years.**

We know from history that life didn't get any easier for them in their new land. God's children would continue to struggle against enemies, foreign and domestic. They would falter under judges and kings. They would suffer setbacks and endure captivities. They would build and rebuild.

But we also know that the Lord stayed with them—day after day, year after year, generation after generation—always *disciplining*, always molding the character of His children and enforcing the correct behavior within them.

Is that still true of us today? Like the saints of old, we are too quick to think that God has abandoned us... that He no longer cares for us... that we are on our own. But nothing could be further from the truth.

We, too, are on a journey to a new land—the Promised Land of Heaven. To get there safely and be all that God intends for us to be—we, too, must be *disciplined*. So, day by day... year by year... trial by trial... and setback after setback... the Lord is busy molding our character and enforcing the correct behavior in our lives.

The words of Moses apply to us today as much as any time in history: **So, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land... a land**

**of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills... a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates... a land of olive trees and honey... a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing... a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper.**

Everything that this past year has thrown (and continues to throw) at us is teaching us that being a disciple of Jesus requires *discipline*. And to be disciplined requires education and training... self-control and determination... knowledge of the Holy Scriptures... and an orderly way of life.

All these things God gives us for our good. Not to chastise and punish us. But to mold our character... and enforce the correct behavior in us. We become *disciplined* by following His lead—wherever He calls us to go, and whatever He asks us to do.

We begin by going to church, remembering our Baptism, confessing our sins and receiving absolution... by hearing God's Word, and receiving Christ's body and blood regularly—for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our faith. It means being careful to keep His commandments, and walking in His ways, and fearing Him more than we fear His *discipline*.

Do we have anything to be thankful for this year? The answer is a resounding, YES! But first, we must confess our sins. And this year, we confess that we have been more thankful for the gifts God has given us—than for God Himself.

Our thankfulness may be *for* this great country, with all the freedoms we have enjoyed. It may be *for* our health and wellbeing, our families, and all our material possessions. But today we are reminded that our thanks is more than *for* something. It is *to* someone—someone who has given us all good things, and teaches us to give thanks.

**Tomorrow, dear friends, you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.**

In the name of Jesus. Amen.