

Grace in Discipline

Grace from the Patriarchs

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Bible Text: Genesis 27-28

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Let me start by asking a question to parents here: parents, how is it going disciplining your children? I think it's safe to assume that if they are sleep deprived from fireworks, it might be a bit more challenging today and if you don't have kids, I'm sure that in the last few days you have interacted with children in such a way that you might ask, "How is the parenting of these children going?" The reality is I think consistent godly discipline of kids in this culture is a challenge because you need to be in it for the long haul. You have to trust that the difficult instruction and the correction that it is no fun to go through for you or the children will one day pay off with blessings for your children and others who interact with your kids in the future.

It's challenging but sometimes, sometimes you get little gems. Little evidences that maybe something is sinking in and it really encourages you. I remember one gem that happened in our family and it happened while I was driving. We have a practice in our family that when someone, I'm not going to say who but somebody is grumpy, again, I'm not going to say who it was, we all have to say at least one thing that we're thankful for so it kind of gets us as a family out of somebody is being grumpy, were all going to be thankful. Well, we got to little Sawyer as I'm driving in the car and he said and I quote, "I am thankful my daddy disciplines me." I almost drove off into the ditch. Right off the road. I was shocked because that is not how it usually goes and most parents can attest that is not a normal conversational interaction with your child about discipline. "Yeah" is not the operative idea. Now, mind you, we had spent hours and hours telling him we were disciplining him and his sister because we love them. We want to teach them how to live wisely in God's world and we want them to experience the joy of obeying God but I didn't expect him to say that. That was just a little gem, a little gift of God's grace to help me go through the tough times.

Have you ever said that to your parents? I have never said that to my mom and dad. Maybe that's an action point for today. I've never said that. How about your God? Have you said to your God, "Thank you for your discipline"? As I reflect on that story, I wonder how often we thank the Lord for his discipline. How often do we see what he is up to in the difficult parts of life and then praise him for it. No doubt this is a challenge and there is no doubt that we need God's grace to have that kind of a mindset and I hope that as we open Scriptures, we will all, by God's grace, be more thankful for his discipline

and I think that fits right in with our theme this year of "Finding Grace," and this summer we're looking at finding grace from the patriarchs. The patriarchs are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph and they are described in the book of Genesis chapters 12 through 50. God graciously engages with these men in order to bring about a reversal of the curse upon this world and instead bring blessing through a promised child, a promised Savior, a promised Redeemer.

In light of that, today we are studying "Grace in Discipline," so please turn in your Bibles to Genesis 27 and 28. That's on page 19 through 21 in the Old Testament. If you need a Bible, there is one underneath the chair in front of you. I would really encourage everybody to get a Bible on your lap because we are going to be reading a lot of Scripture. We are going to be in and out of Scripture so just throughout the whole sermon we are going to be reading chunks of Scripture. That's what we are going to be doing so prepare yourself for that. Delight yourself in that. If you want further study in the book of Genesis, Pastor Aucoin put together a great study and it's in your sermon notes as well as online if you would like further study as well.

Let me briefly remind you of the storyline. God has called a childless, pagan idolater, Abraham, to participate in God's plan to bless the world. Abraham responds to God's plan, participating in it, and it provides to be an example of faith for us. He trusts God and it was credited to him as righteousness. God worked through Abraham and through Sarah and her dead womb to provide life. She was barren and yet God brought about a child that would carry on the promises of God for an appointed child, a lineage that would one day be a blessing to the world. So Abraham and Sarah miraculously conceive Isaac.

Now Isaac is all grown up. He is married to Rebekah and Rebekah is also barren but Isaac, seeing his father's mature faith that was matured over time, believed God could bring life from deadness and he prayed to God and God allowed them to conceive but this conception presented a potential problem. When there is only one child, tracing the promise of blessing is a very easy thing, there is only one child. Well, one child inherits the promise, the blessing, etc. Well, in the case of Isaac and Rebekah, they have twins which means now which lineage is the blessing going to go through? How is the promise of blessing going to work itself out? And last week we studied the grace of God choosing among the twins and God promised Isaac and Rebecca that the promise of blessing would come through Jacob. That was his promise.

Now, let me just say a word about this concept of blessing. There is going to be fireworks over blessing today. There is going to be fighting about this blessing. When we think of the word "blessing," oftentimes we think of just someone saying, "Oh, bless you, my child." You know, just something you say or "bless you" if you sneeze or "bless their heart." Do you know what I mean? It's like just something you say. It doesn't mean a whole lot. That is not what is happening in this story. I just want to talk about a few things of blessing before we get into this. Blessing in the patriarchal history represents God's promise of creation fruitfulness, abundance, prosperity, multiplication of descendents and that includes dominion over the earth, a right to rule, exercising

dominion, being in charge of things. Then a life giving relationship with the Creator God which ultimately will come through one seed, the lineage of Abraham. Being a part of the plan of God to bless the world. This was a big deal. It was not a throwaway statement and once it was officially bestowed from father to son, it could not be changed. It was a done deal. Again, God promises Isaac and Rebekah that the blessing would go through Jacob, the younger of the twin sons of Isaac.

Now, I'm going to give you a little teaser to the end of the narrative. Do you guys like to eat dessert first sometimes? Yeah, sometimes. You see, God had promised Jacob the blessing, right? Let's look at kind of the end of a portion of the narrative to find out where Jacob is in light of the promise of blessing. Look at Genesis 28:10. This is kind of the end of a portion of the narrative, "Then Jacob departed from Beersheba," which is "the well of seven" or "the well of fullness," "and went toward Haran," which is back towards where Abraham came from. Then verse 11, "He came to a certain place and spent the night there." It's the middle of nowhere. We have no idea where this is and "the sun had set," meaning it was dark, "and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place." Now, that's the end of one of the portions of the narrative. We see Jacob is leaving the well of fruitfulness. He is returning to a land where his grandfather came from, kind of a reversal, and Jacob is in the middle of nowhere and Jacob's only possession is a rock. That's all he has. And just to top it all off, it's dark. It's scary. He's in an empty place. It's not only dark but it's also symbolic of where Jacob is finding himself, in a dark place. This is the blessing from God. He has a rock and he is alone and afraid. How did Jacob get there? What about the promise of blessing? The answer is: God is disciplining his child, Jacob. He is not alone.

That's the end of the story, end of that portion of the narrative. Let's go back but let's kind of understand our whole purpose in these thought processes this morning and look at 3 grace saturated reasons God disciplines his children. Why does he discipline his children? And it is packed with grace when you think about it. Now, a small caveat: the type of discipline that we are talking about this morning is about the actions of God's children embarking on sinful practices where he needs to correct them. I'm not talking about general suffering or just things going bad in your life because of the sin of others or living in a sin cursed body or a sin cursed world. We're talking about when you and I behave in a way that does not please our heavenly Father and he chooses to discipline us and yet it is packed with grace.

The first reason before we get into our text is to teach us from where God's blessings do not come from. He graciously shows us where blessings do not come from. Now, let's go back to the Scripture. Look at Genesis 27:1. So we're going to be in and out of the Scripture and I'm going to make comments along the way. "Now it came about, when Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, that he called his older son Esau and said to him, 'My son.' And he said to him, 'Here I am.' Isaac said, 'Behold now, I am old and I do not know the day of my death. Now then, please take your gear, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me; and prepare a savory dish for me such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die.'" That wasn't where the promise of blessing was.

Verse 5, "Rebekah was listening while Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game to bring home," what happened? Verse 6, "Rebekah said to her son Jacob, 'Behold, I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, saying, "Bring me some game and prepare a savory dish for me, that I may eat, and bless you in the presence of the LORD before my death." Now therefore, my son, listen to me as I command you. Go now to the flock and bring me two choice young goats from there, that I may prepare them as a savory dish for your father, such as he loves. Then you shall bring it to your father, that he may eat, so that he may bless you before his death.'" Now note that Rebekah loved Jacob more and Rebekah sets out a plan to help God fulfill the promise that Jacob would get the blessing. Note this plan is about to violate all of the 10 Commandments except maybe, "Thou shall not kill." Now, the commandments had not been instituted yet but just note how the father of the nation of Israel who was given the 10 Commandments, Jacob, how he acts in light of this.

Verse 11, "Jacob answered his mother Rebekah, 'Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man and I am a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, then I will be as a deceiver.'" Well ironically, that's what Jacob's name means. He is a usurper, a trickster. So, "I will be as a deceiver in his sight," notice again the irony that Jacob is blind but he is worrying about being a deceiver in his sight, "and I will bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing." He's worried about the consequences, the results.

Verse 13, "But his mother said to him, 'Your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me.' So he went and got them, and brought them to his mother; and his mother made savory food such as his father loved. Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. And she put the skins of the young goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. She also gave the savory food and the bread, which she had made, to her son Jacob. Then he came to his father and said, 'My father.' And he said, 'Here I am. Who are you, my son?' Jacob said to his father, 'I am Esau your firstborn,'" lie #1 and not honoring his father. "I have done as you told me," lie #2. "Get up, please, sit and eat of my game," lie #3, "that you may bless me." Coveting. Getting what he wants.

Verse 20, "Isaac said to his son, 'How is it that you have it so quickly, my son?' And he said, 'Because the LORD your God caused it to happen to me.'" He is using the name of the Lord in vain, in an empty way, leveraging the name of the Lord for his lies.

Verse 21, "Then Isaac said to Jacob, 'Please come close, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not.' So Jacob came close to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, 'The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.' He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. And he said, 'Are you really my son Esau?' And he said, 'I am,'" lie #4. "So he said, 'Bring it to me, and I will eat of my son's game, that I may bless you.' And he brought it to him, and he ate; he also brought him wine and he drank. Then his father Isaac said to him, 'Please come close and kiss me, my son.' So he came close and kissed him; and when he smelled the smell of his garments, he blessed him."

What a situation. What a ruse. What a masquerade. What a family. What a son and wife. There is so much going on here that is just wrong but there is also so much irony. The strongman, Esau, gets tricked by the weaker son, Jacob. Rebekah who was blessed in having children invites a curse on herself in order to secure God's future blessing. Rebekah and Jacob apparently believe that God can't prevent an aging blind man from blessing the wrong son, they had to step in. And one thing that I love about God's word is they don't whitewash what the family of God looks like. It is full of dysfunction and yet God is able to still work. But do you see how Rebekah and Jacob thought that they needed to help God's promises along? "This is what God said so now I'm justified in doing whatever I want to do to bring about what I think needs to be brought about." Well, God had to teach Jacob where God's blessing does not come from. It does not come from a position of cultural power.

Now, think with me for a moment about Esau. Esau is the classic definition of a man's man. He's hairy. He's an outdoorsman, right? He's a hunter. He slices up animals and to top it off, he is the firstborn, the position of power and privilege. The firstborn got a double portion and all the other siblings had to share. If there are only 2, it means the second gets nothing. He is everything a nomadic father would want his son to be. If ever there was a person who could command people's respect and carry on the lineage of Isaac, it is Esau. It's kind of like weighing in at 300 pounds, 6 foot 6, the champion of the wilderness, Esau.

Then there is Jacob. He is hairless. He couldn't grow a beard even at the age of 75. Just kidding. But he stays inside because his skin is fair and it might get sunburned. He cooks with his mother. He is with his mother a lot, okay? But Jacob grew up in life under the shadow of his father's love for Esau which was based on society's standard and cultural norms of what a man's man was and Jacob had to disguise himself and present himself as that standard to his father. Jacob had to masquerade and camouflage, pretending to be somebody else to get what he wanted. What we learn here is that God's blessing never comes through being what the world thinks you should be and the temptation to do so is readily prevalent in all of our lives every day. God wanted to teach his children and to discipline his children to teach them where blessing does not come from, not through cultural norms but through him.

Also, he was teaching that God's blessing does not come through unrighteous behavior. Note how many of the 10 Commandments Jacob, who is the physical father of the nation of Israel, who received the 10 Commandments, were given he broke. You shall not take the name of your God in vain. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. You shall not covet. You shall honor your father and mother. And in some way, he broke the first commandment, having no other gods before me. His God was the blessing itself, rather than the giver of the blessing.

Let's just stop and apply that for just a moment. What worldly identity are you trying to pursue? Who do you want to be like? And how do you believe being like that will result in your blessing? "I have to be the definition of cool so that everyone wants to be with

me. I need to be the definition of successful so I have wealth and power and ease and comfort and so everybody is going to look up and want to be me. I want to be accepted. I want to be liked by everybody and please everybody so that I have lots of friends and I feel good about myself." What identity are you trying to go after? Do you have to have a position of power in your family? At work? Or even in church? And what are you willing to do to get it? To try to get that identity? To lie. To steal. To deceive. To masquerade. To use others. To be unfaithful to others and to your God. The only identity you need is to be covered by the person and work of Jesus Christ. The only position of blessing is that of Christ's humility and his righteousness. If we're not functioning in light of our identity in Christ and pursuing his righteousness, our loving Father will discipline us for our good.

So the first grace filled reason that God disciplines his children is to teach us where blessing does not come from: cultural power and unrighteous behavior. The second reason is to show us the empty end of man's ways of obtaining blessing. We are about to read Esau's response to his brother's hurtful trick. What do you think Esau is going to do? Do you think he's going to bake Jacob a cake and say, "Congratulations for securing the blessing"? Esau is a hunter. Think arrow through the heart. That's the gift he's going to give. What do we expect when we climb the corporate ladder on the backs of others? Others climbing right over our backs.

Look in the text at Genesis 27:30, "Now it came about, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had hardly gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. Then he also made savory food, and brought it to his father; and he said to his father, 'Let my father arise and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me.' Isaac his father said to him, 'Who are you?' And he said, 'I am your son, your firstborn, Esau.' Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, 'Who was he then that hunted game and brought it to me, so that I ate of all of it before you came, and blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed.' When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, 'Bless me, even me also, O my father!' And he said, 'Your brother came deceitfully and has taken away your blessing.' Then he said, 'Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times?'" referring back to the birthright. Jump to verse 41, "So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.'"

Look again to the verse we first read, Genesis 28:10, Jacob departs from Beersheba, went toward Haran, came to a certain place and spent the night there in the middle of nowhere. It was dark because the sun had set and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head and lay down in that place. Jacob is friendless, even his mother is not with him right now. Jacob is possession-less, all he has is a rock. Jacob is defenseless, all he has is a rock. Jacob is family-less and his brother wants to kill him and he is in exile on the run, a fugitive and it is dark. Jacob is fleeing the Promised Land and he is going into the wilderness. He is going into exile. What did he think would happen with his actions? Did he think, "I'm going to deceive and everything is going to be great"? He is leaving the well of abundance for a place of emptiness, going into exile in the wilderness and it

will seem to him as dark days and it actually is dark. Jacob's ways have left him empty, alone and in the wilderness.

Many of us know exactly what that's like. Maybe you for years have tried to handle marriage your own way and tried to manipulate or cajole or use anger or leverage and it felt apart; it broke and then there is lots of hurt. Maybe you have tried to handle parenting with manipulation and frustration, anger, or just you haven't been engaged and the result has been challenging or there are hurtful situations. Maybe you have tried to navigate work in unethical ways and it has come back and you have lost your job or it's much, much harder now. Maybe you cheated in school and now when you get on the work-site you don't know what you are doing and it is causing conflict for you and others.

Folks, why does God promise us blessing but allow us to go through the wilderness? Why is this so necessary for us? It's so that we learn that our ways are empty. We need to come to the end of ourselves and find ourselves empty so that we can be filled with the only thing that truly matters, God himself. His ways. His plans. Who he is and our close intimate relationship with him. And by God's grace, many of you have learned this blessed lesson. Many of us have learned that in the midst of the wilderness when God is disciplining me, I need to grow and learn and draw close to him and respond to his discipline and grow. And you have learned the Lord's discipline and learned that his love for you is deeper than you thought and you found him to be faithful. As we reflect on empty times in your past, many have learned the third grace filled reason that God disciplines his children and that is: to assure us of the power of God's presence in our emptiness. You see, God empties us of himself so he can fill us with himself.

Look now what happens to Jacob. He encounters God in his emptiness. Look at Genesis 28:10. We see verse 10, leaving Beersheba, going to Haran. He's got the rock under his head and look at verse 12, "He had a dream, and behold, a ladder," a better translation probably is a ramp or a stairway. "He had a dream, and behold, a ramp was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, 'I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants.'" God says to his child, the possession-less man, that this will ultimately be, you'll be full of descendents.

Verse 14, "Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed." God says to his child, the family-less man, that he will have quite the family that blesses the whole world.

Verse 15, "Behold, I am with you." God says to his child who is alone that God is with him. God says that to his child and he says, "I will keep you wherever you go." God says to his child, the defenseless man, that he will keep him. He will protect him. "For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." God says, "My promise depends on me. It depends on my presence, on my promise." He is taking a trickster like Jacob to become a man who trusts the God of heaven. A trickster to a truster.

Verse 16, "Jacob awoke from his sleep and said," it's so sweet what he says, he says, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it.

Verse 17, "He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. He called the name of that place Bethel," house of God or gateway of heaven.

So what is this Jacob ladder thing all about? Why did Jacob name this nameless place Bethel, the house of God, the gateway to God? Remember, Jacob had left the family of promise where he thought God was. He left the land of promise where he thought God was. So he's leaving the land of promise, the family of promise. He thinks he's leaving the God of promise. However, at the very spot where Jacob lay his head on a rock, his only possession personifying his emptiness, was the very spot where a ramp from heaven to earth appeared to him. It's also very interesting to note that the ramp from heaven is the exact opposite of the tower of Babel. The tower of Babel is man creating a ramp to heaven to make their name great whereas this is Jacob's ramp, God's ramp of coming down from heaven to earth. God builds a ramp down to earth in the emptiness, in the dark days even of discipline.

At that moment when Jacob was the emptiest, God showed up as he promised and he showed that his promise includes the power of heaven, the power of God on earth, the ramp. "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." The power is God's promise of being with us. God promises his presence with his children, "I am with you even if you don't see it. Do you trust what I say when you don't see how it's going to work?" How amazing that God wants to be with his children. The question we have to ask ourselves is: do we see the blessing of his presence or do we clamor after the presents from God? Do we want his presence or do we want presents from him? You see, his presence means he is at work. God is always at work if we have eyes to see. If we have eyes informed by his words, how he has revealed himself to us, to think and trust what he says and that is that God reigns over discipline to accomplish his good plans.

The angelic messengers carrying out God's decrees from heaven to earth and back represent this. What is this picture of busy angels going up and down the stairs? Did they forget something? No, angels are God's servants, his messengers, to carry out his decrees. The picture that God is giving Jacob is that, "When I speak, the angels carry out my decrees and they are busy because I am at work. They come back and get more commands. They go and decree them and deliver them and they come back and get more. Just constantly going up and down." The picture is, "I am at work. Trust me. You may not see it but I am at work all the time."

So Jacob, as all of this is happening, is learning that the decrees of God will not be thwarted even in his emptiness. So the idea here is that nothing is out of place in the emptiness of the moment because God is at work. He is disciplining his child to trust him

and not go his own way. You see, all aspects of the emptiness are orchestrated by a loving God to teach us that he and his ways are best and that he is working for our good. Folks, if you find yourself in a place of emptiness because of your past actions that have lingering consequences, I would encourage you to think about the reality that you are in a very ripe position to be filled with the presence of God if you'll have eyes to see. In your broken family. In your lost job. In the wayward child. In a failed endeavor. In that empty place. Do you think about the reality that God has built a ramp down from heaven to fill you with his blessing as you turn to him and his ways, acknowledging what he has done with the ramp from heaven to earth?

I want to show you an amazing corollary in the New Testament and it really answers the question: who is that ramp of God with us? When Jesus called his first disciples, he encounters a man named Nathaniel. Nathaniel's brother, Philip, is telling him about Jesus of Nazareth. Nathaniel says, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Nathaniel is a very straight shooter, okay? Just says it like it is. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" He's talking about Jesus. Nazareth is like nothing good can come out of there. Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no deceit." That's what Jesus says about Nathaniel which is fascinating because you think about the reference of deceit and him saying an Israelite. Israel was Jacob's new name. Jacob, the deceiver, was later renamed Israel. Jesus is referring back to Jacob's story and he is about to explain what good can come out of a nation that had its roots in treachery and deceit.

Verse 48 says, "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.' Nathanael answered Him, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.' And He said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see,'" and here it is, "'the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.'" Isn't that powerful to see how that's part of God's plan for us to find our hope in the Son of Man and God's sovereign plan that he is going to carry out. That is the ramp. The power of heaven on earth, Jesus. The promise of God with us on earth, Jesus. The promise to fill us and bless us in our emptiness, Jesus.

Have you been filled with Christ as your only hope of salvation? Maybe that's the first thing to ask: have you trusted God's provision for you in Christ? Have you trusted his way rather than your way to come to him? Is his death, his burial and his resurrection your only hope of salvation? The only ramp you could possibly take to be reconciled to God so that you can be truly free and receive the blessing God promised through Abraham? If you have not done that, I would encourage you to do it today. There is a ramp from heaven to earth fully available to you in Christ. Take it. Respond to who Jesus is.

Believing friend, are you learning his ways? Are you embracing your identity in him alone and not in anything else? Daily fighting the battle to find your joy in Christ rather than joy in other things and then using nefarious means to get that joy that you think will

fill you but really won't? Are you responding to the Lord's loving corrective discipline to take you away from your way to bless you in Christ and to trust him and to draw near to him? He wants to bless you as a heavenly Father and the best blessing he can give you is Jesus and for you to become more like him and he is going to correct you when you are not finding your identity in Christ and when you are not pursuing his righteousness. Do you see God's love in the emptiness? Do you see God's goodness in the discipline?

Here's one more passage just to reaffirm God's love and goodness in discipline. Hebrews 12:4-13 says, talking about sin, talking about resisting our own way, "You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.' It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." Then he goes on to say, "strengthen us, heal us." We struggle with wanting to go our own way, believing that it will bring about the blessing that we so desperately crave and God is so good and loving he will discipline us and correct us and we should thank him for it.

Here's the takeaway, one of the things I might encourage you to do: take some time in the next week to reflect on your life and think about some of the dark days. Think about some of the times maybe the Lord was trying to get your attention and correct you and teach you and maybe just reflect on those and thank him for being there even though you didn't realize it because he used that to bring you to where you are today. Maybe this last week was even a time of consequences of unwise choices and you're suffering some of the consequences. Will you thank him for that because he is trying to direct you back to where satisfaction and blessing comes from, himself? And will you pray and ask him to help you respond to future discipline with thankfulness and joy? I would encourage you to make a list and pray thanking the Lord for his past, his present and his future discipline in your life because he is good and loving and wants to bless you in Christ.

So to summarize: grace is prevalent in discipline and God disciplines us to teach us where God's blessings do not come from, to show us how man's ways are empty and will not obtain blessing and to assure us of the superior power of God's presence even in our emptiness. Are you thankful for God's discipline? And are you recognizing he wants to guide you and bless you in Christ?

Let's pray and ask him to help us in that end.

Lord, we admit to you that our way often looks best and we believe, Lord, that we are often justified in our actions and, Lord, so often we find brokenness and emptiness because of it. Lord, instead of being embittered against you or angry at others, Lord, help us to humbly respond and see you at work in the midst of even dark days and times of emptiness, recognizing you want us to trust you, draw near to you so that you will fill us with yourself. Lord, I pray you will help us find our identity in nothing but the shed blood of Christ on our behalf. And Lord, I pray that as we live out our identity, we will seek to grow in holiness and righteousness and thank you when we get off track because you're going to discipline us. Lord, help us even today be thankful for your discipline and, Lord, I pray you prepare us to respond in thankfulness in the days ahead as you fulfill your role as a faithful heavenly Father, drawing us to you. Lord, help us do this and be thankful for who you are. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.