

**ECC Growth Groups – Term 4, 2014**  
**Behold our God**  
**Study 6: God is Merciful in Discipline (Hebrews 12)<sup>1</sup>**

**Big Idea:** God demonstrates his Fatherly mercy and love through the discipline of his children

**Study Aim:** That group members will: (i) consider their natural response to hardships and difficulties in life; and (ii) be challenged and encouraged by the truth that, during those times of discipline, God is acting mercifully towards them.

**Discussion Starter**

Think about a time in your life when something didn't go according to plan, or when you experienced some kind of difficulty. What can God seem to be like during those times?<sup>2</sup>

**Prayer**

Spend some time praying together before you look at God's Word.

**Bible Reading**

Read Hebrews 12:1-13.

**Passage Questions**

In verses 5 and 6 the author quotes from Proverbs 3. What are two possible responses to discipline that we are to avoid?

*We are to avoid making light of God's discipline of us and we are to avoid losing heart (v 5).*

How might the truths in verse 6 help us to respond rightly?

*Acknowledging that God's discipline of us is an expression of his love and an affirmation of our status as sons will help us to not make light of his discipline nor lose heart during those times.*

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<sup>1</sup> This series of studies is loosely based on the booklet 'Meeting God' by J. I. Packer in the *Lifeguide Bible Study* series (1986, IVP).

<sup>2</sup> If you look at the Application questions at the end of the study you will note that this Discussion Starter and the closing applicatory section are intended to work closely together. It is hoped that this question will lay some thought foundations that will be built upon at the end.

Why do we find it difficult to have this perspective?

*The events of life can be confusing and distressing for us. Our sinful nature, the world and the devil will all tempt us to dismiss what God might be up to or tempt us to give up on our relationship with him. Discipline will probably not seem loving at the time and may cause us to feel more like God's enemies than his children.*

### Activity<sup>3</sup>

Split your group into a few smaller groups consisting of between two and four members in each. Read out the following instructions and provide time for each group to complete the Activity.

In verses 7-10 the author picks up on the family image from Proverbs 3 and provides more detail. Compare and contrast what is said in these verses by filling out the table below.

Verse(s)	Human fathers	God as Father
7-8	<i>Every human father disciplines his sons. Non-discipline is indication that a child is illegitimate and not a true son</i>	<i>God's treatment of us in this way – i.e. discipline – should be taken as affirmation that we are his children</i>
9	<i>The discipline of human fathers produces respect</i>	<i>How much more should we submit to our heavenly Father's discipline</i>
10	<i>Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best</i>	<i>God disciplines us for our good – that we might share in his holiness</i>

Bring the groups back together.

<sup>3</sup> A larger blank copy of the table has been provided in Appendix 1 for you to print off and use for each group.

## Passage Questions

From these verses (vv 7-10), how would you summarise what God is like?<sup>4</sup>

*He is our Father, who through discipline is treating us as sons (v 7). He is the Father of our spirits (v 9). God is working for our good (v 10). God desires for us to share in his holiness (v 10).*

From these verses (vv 7-10), how would you summarise how we are to respond to God?

*Respect/submission (v 9). Humbly resting in the assurance that we are his children.*

In what ways is verse 11 both realistic and hopeful?

*The verse doesn't hide the fact that discipline is painful rather than pleasant. But there is also the promise that for those who are trained by the discipline in the end it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace.*

In our last two studies we have concentrated on the truths that 'God is holy' and 'God is love'. How do these two truths come together in what we have been considering in this study?

*If God merely loved in the way that we often think of love (of course, as we saw in the previous study, he doesn't), he would treat us sentimentally and be unlikely to exercise any discipline at all. If God were merely holy we would undoubtedly experience his discipline (and more, given what we saw in that study) yet this would be without the assurance of him being our loving heavenly Father.*

*Interestingly, both concepts ("love" and "holy") are explicitly included in this passage. Verse 6 states that God disciplines those he "loves" and verse 10 speaks of sharing in God's "holiness" through discipline.*

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<sup>4</sup> Including these kinds of questions after an activity in which the larger group has been split up can be very useful. It brings the groups back to the same common understanding and awareness (which is particularly important for groups that may have struggled with the activity) and by asking the groups to summarise as opposed to merely reporting back it helps them to reflect and process what they have observed.

### **Application Questions<sup>5</sup>**

Share of an occasion in life where you feel that you experienced the Lord's discipline.

How were you tempted to either treat it lightly or to lose heart?

As you look back, in what ways did you experience some of the truths that we've seen in this study?

### **Close + Prayer**

See Appendix 2 – 'Theology to Doxology' and then close the study with a time of prayer.

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that these application questions, and quite possibly the whole study, will be sensitive for some group members. This is where it becomes apparent that a Bible study leader is much more than merely a Bible teacher. There is a pastoral element to this ministry that we cannot, and must not, lose sight of. You may, or may not, be aware of significant struggles in the lives of those in your care. The truth of God's discipline is one that we need to be taught as Christians but the manner in which you go about this study will be just as important, if not more so, than its content.

**Appendix 1 – Activity**

<b>Verse(s)</b>	<b>Human fathers</b>	<b>God as Father</b>

<b>Verse</b>	<b>Human fathers</b>	<b>God as Father</b>

## Appendix 2 – Theology to Doxology<sup>6</sup>

For our ‘*Theology to Doxology*’ in this study the song, ‘*God moves in a mysterious way*’, has been selected. If you would like to listen to a more traditional version online, you can use the URL below:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6z0e\\_xSC8to](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6z0e_xSC8to)

For a more modern version, you can use this URL:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtnapVDuPfg>

Please note that if you use this more modern version, verse 2 is omitted and between verses 4 and 5 some Scriptures (from Genesis 50 and Romans 8) are briefly shown. Interestingly, the clip finishes with a reference to Hebrews 12:10.

If you would like to sing together or simply read out the lyrics, they are included below:

### Verse 1

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm

### Verse 2

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sovereign will

### Verse 3

Ye fearful saints fresh courage take  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy and shall break  
In blessings on your head

### Verse 4

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense  
But trust Him for His grace  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face

### Verse 5

His purposes will ripen fast  
Unfolding every hour  
The bud may have a bitter taste  
But sweet will be the flower

### Verse 6

Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan His work in vain  
God is His own interpreter  
And He will make it plain

CCLI Song # 155909  
Thomas Tallis | William Cowper  
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Music: Public Domain

<sup>6</sup> Theology – literally ‘a word of/about God’ is to lead to Doxology – literally ‘a word of praise/glory’. Please see the introductory notes to this section in Study 1 – Appendix 1 if you need to recall the rationale behind its inclusion.