**Week 13:** *Proverbs: Discipline and Correction*

**Hook** A picture containing text, tree

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**Main Point: Lack of discipline leads to ruin, but discipline leads to life.**

Teacher, divide your LifeGroup into small groups and ask them to discuss the following questions:

1. Name a time when it was challenging for you to receive correction from another person. What made your experience difficult?
2. How has receiving correction impacted your ability to achieve a goal or aspiration? Give an example.
3. What role does discipline have in the Christian life? Explain.

**Transition:** Today’s lesson will study the benefits of receiving discipline and correction. Though experiencing discipline may be difficult at times, our humble willingness to receive correction can produce life.

**Week 13:** *Proverbs: Discipline and Correction*

**Book**

**Main Point: Lack of discipline leads to ruin, but discipline leads to life.**

**Proverbs 5:11–14, 22–23; 6:23; 9:8–9; 12:1; 13:13–18; 15:10, 32 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** Welcoming discipline and correction is a sign of humility and maturity.

**Q: Give some modern examples of how a lack of discipline can lead to ruin.**

**Q: What factors prevent people from receiving discipline/correction from legitimate sources?**

Reading this main point – “lack of discipline leads to ruin” – out of context might make you think it’s referring to self-discipline. Self-disciplined and diligent people typically have greater success and prosperity. While that is true, and it is addressed in Proverbs in other places (see lesson 5 on diligence and laziness), that is not the kind of “discipline” discussed here. In every one of these passages, “discipline” refers to people’s willingness to accept correction and discipline from others – perhaps an authority figure, or maybe just a concerned friend or loved one.[[1]](#endnote-1)

This topic may be difficult for some modern Americans to hear, as we tend to be an individualistic, self-reliant culture. Often, we think of discipline or correction as only something we do for children. Once we become adults, no one else has the right to “tell us what to do.” But the Bible is clear that correction doesn’t stop at adulthood, nor does it only apply to newer Christians. Even church leaders need to be willing to accept correction, just as Peter received correction from Paul (Galatians 2:11). We are all on a lifelong journey of sanctification, becoming more like Jesus. None of us gets it right all the time. If we want to grow in our faith, we must be willing to accept correction.

If we are so stuck in our ways that we refuse to admit we could ever be wrong, we will become more and more like children than mature adults.[[2]](#endnote-2) In other words, modern psychological research agrees with the Proverbs – the reproofs of discipline are “the way of life” (6:23) and those who listen to reproof gain intelligence (15:32). But refusing reproof and hating discipline will lead to ruin, destruction, snares and death. Being willing to accept discipline and even welcoming it is a sign of emotional and spiritual maturity.

Using contrasting parallelism, these proverbs set up a lot of comparisons of those who accept discipline and those who don’t. Those who hate discipline bring destruction, poverty and disgrace on themselves, while those who listen to it are rewarded and honored (13:13–18). Whoever ignores instruction “despises himself, but he who listens … gains intelligence” (15:32). “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge but he who hates reproof is stupid” (12:1). The word translated “stupid” here is more literally “brutish,” like an animal instead of a human. Solomon is saying that one of the distinctions between humans and brutes/animals is the rational feature of accepting discipline and implementing changes to our lives to better ourselves.[[3]](#endnote-3) Taking correction and growing from it is one of the things that makes us human.

This kind of attitude requires humility, self-awareness and vulnerability, which can be scary but also very freeing. It means we can let go of the need for the appearance of perfection. If every human has areas in which we need to grow, then it’s OK to admit mistakes and weaknesses. It’s good even. It’s part of the growth process and nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, it’s something to be celebrated and shared with others so they can learn from our correction and growth, too.

When we have this kind of attitude toward correction, we see it as helpful rather than shaming or judgmental. Which means we will welcome correction offered by others, and we can correct others in a loving, helpful and grace-filled way rather than a critical and judgmental way. Consider your favorite sport or hobby. Wouldn’t you welcome someone’s help to correct your golf swing, your knitting stitches, or your running form? People pay personal trainers to help them get in better shape or business coaches to help them succeed in business. In our church communities, God-honoring correction is something believers can do for one another spiritually.

Hebrews tells us that one of our purposes in meeting together is to stir one another up to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24). James says to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another so that we may be healed (James 5:16). Paul said God’s Word teaches, corrects, and trains us in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). As the body of Christ, we are called to correction and accountability to help one another grow! Only this kind of attitude toward discipline can create healthy, authentic biblical communities in which people welcome loving correction and give helpful correction to others out of love and concern, not to tear them down. This is the kind of community the body of Christ needs to be for one another. We will want to be that for each other when we see discipline and correction as the way to life and prosperity, goodness, knowledge, wisdom and maturity.[[4]](#endnote-4)

**Q: Describe friendships you have where you spur each other on spiritually.**

**Q: How can we create healthy, trusting relationships for accountability and correction within our LifeGroup?**

**Q: How would you describe the life of someone who spurns correction?**

**Proverbs 3:11–12; 13:1; 15:5 and Deuteronomy 8:5–6; Hebrews 12:5–7 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** The Lord disciplines us like a loving Father.

**Q: Why is parental discipline a sign of love?**

**Q: Why does accepting discipline from a parent require trust in them?**

The Bible says God is a loving Father. He shows compassion on His children (Psalm 103:13), gives good gifts to them (Matthew 7:11), prepares an inheritance in heaven for us as His adoptive sons/heirs (Romans 8:17), gives us life (1 Corinthians 8:6), protects us (Psalm 68:5), and molds us (Isaiah 64:8). God has a personal relationship with us (2 Corinthians 6:18). He loves us unconditionally and loved us before we loved Him (1 John 4:19). And Proverbs tells us, along with other passages, that God loves us enough to discipline us as a good father does.

This concept might be difficult for some of us, especially if we had a negative experience of discipline as children, being disciplined out of anger instead of love. But God’s Word says the Lord’s discipline is a sign of His great love for us. Just as loving parents spend a lot of time and take intentional care to raise their children as best they can, God takes great pains to mold us into who He wants us to be because of this deep parental love He has for us. Because correction helps us grow, we should welcome it just as we would welcome a coach correcting our tennis swing. We should especially welcome the Lord’s correction, even more than another human being, for two reasons:

* While other people may be wrong in their feedback/correction, God is the Creator of the entire universe, and He is never wrong, so He *always* knows what is best.
* While other people may have ulterior motives or secretly wish us harm, He is our heavenly Father who does everything out of pure love for us.

Because we know our heavenly Father is always right and that He loves us, we can trust that His discipline will always be best for us.

The father/son discipline language harkens back to God’s covenant with David, which referred to Solomon (in the near-future fulfillment of the covenant) and Jesus (in the far-future fulfillment of it). “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. … I will discipline him … but my steadfast love will not depart from him” (2 Samuel 7:14–15). Solomon had experienced the Lord’s discipline himself and seen firsthand the good that comes from it. Adults can often look back at their parents’ discipline and recognize that it wasn’t for the purpose of being mean or restrictive but instead it was intended to help them grow into mature, responsible adults. Solomon could say the same about God’s discipline of him.

**Q: Have you experienced the Lord’s discipline in your life? Give specific examples.**

**Q: What tools does the Lord use to discipline His children?**

**Q: Describe areas of your life in which God has molded you into a more mature believer.**

**Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13; and 29:17 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** We discipline our children because we love them.

**Q: Why is it unloving not to discipline your child?**

**Q: Describe how you have witnessed children (without using names) being spoiled and how it affected them as adults.**

We have seen that accepting discipline is good for us, helping us grow in emotional and spiritual maturity *and* that the Lord disciplines us because He loves us like a good Father. Understanding and combining these two truths tells us why we should discipline our own children. [Note: we’re not going to debate positive versus negative reinforcement. We will just discuss generally about disciplining children, not any particular *method* of discipline.]

Proverbs has some very practical advice here. When parents don’t discipline their children but let them behave how they want, they often grow up to be spoiled, self-centered adults – in effect, children in grown-up bodies. Solomon said that “folly is bound up in the heart of a child” (22:15); this is the doctrine of original sin. Human beings are born naturally “foolish” (i.e., wanting to pursue our desires), so we need to be taught and trained how to be wise (i.e., how to follow God).[[5]](#endnote-5) If we love our children, we will want them to grow into mature, wise, godly adults. This is not an easy task, and it doesn’t happen by accident. We must be *diligent* to discipline them (13:24). The goal of parenting isn’t to “raise children”; it’s to *raise* *adults*.

Proverbs uses strong contrasting language when discussing correction: Parents who don’t discipline their children *hate* them, but parents who love their children are diligent to discipline them (13:24). It’s no fun to be “the bad guy,” but we do it diligently because we know it’s best for them. We’ve all seen what happens when a parent tries to be “the fun parent,” their kid’s best friend, or never lets their kids suffer the consequences of their actions. They may do it out of love, but Proverbs tells us it is “hate,” because that kind of parenting is like “putting [your child] to death” (19:18). This could be taken literally. In the Mosaic Law, the punishment for a brazenly disobedient son was stoning (Deuteronomy 21:18–21). It’s a warning: Discipline your child now, or you may be putting him to death later. But this counsel can also be applied figuratively. Raising your kids without discipline sets them up for a life of selfishness and entitlement, which will only lead them to ruin – maybe even actual death.[[6]](#endnote-6)

**Q: In what ways is it hard to discipline 1) diligently and 2) out of love, not anger? What have you found to be helpful to ensure that you are disciplining diligently and out of love?**

**Q: How does seeing parenting as “raising adults” make you think differently about it?**

**Week 13:** *Proverbs: Discipline and Correction*

**Took**

**Main Point: Lack of discipline leads to ruin, but discipline leads to life.**

Our willingness to humbly receive discipline and correction can dictate the direction of our lives, either toward life or ruin. In the movie *Finding Nemo*, Nemo’s father warns him against touching a boat far away from safety. Nemo had been sheltered from danger for most of his life and did not appreciate his father’s protection, so he disregards his father’s warning and ends up being captured. Because Nemo thought little of his father’s wisdom, he was exposed to greater danger than he ever could have imagined.

Throughout today’s lesson, you may have remembered an area in your life where you poorly received discipline. Fortunately, our God’s grace is greater than any error we have made. First John 1:9 makes it clear that if we confess our sins, Christ will forgive us and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Take a moment to thank God for His forgiveness. Ask Him to lead you toward an attitude accepting discipline and correction, the path toward life rather than ruin.

**CHALLENGES**

**THINK:** Why is it hard for me to see the places I need to change? Why is it difficult for me to accept criticism or correction from others? In what ways do I need to humble myself to be open to correction? On the flip side, are there some people who are not trustworthy in their attempts to correct me?

Think and pray through reasons you might be hesitant to accept criticism from others, both unhealthy reasons (your sin, stubbornness, or lack of desire to change) and healthy ones (people who are unsafe or untrustworthy). Think about things you might need to change to create or be part of an accountability community.

**PRAY:** Pray for God to reveal to you any way you need to be corrected or disciplined. Ask Him to bring His discipline and His correction into your life. Ask Him to show you where you need to grow and how you need to change. Ask Him for a friend to come alongside you to encourage you and spur you on to love and good deeds.

**ACT:** Ask for accountability. Think of (at least) one person you can ask to be an accountability partner. Someone you can be completely open, honest and vulnerable with. Someone you trust to share correction and discipline with you in a loving and kind way, not in a critical and judgmental way.

Hook, Took and editing by Jonathan Adkins

1. Allen P. Ross, “Proverbs,” Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Proverbs–Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Justin Bariso, “How Emotionally Intelligent People Handle Criticism: They Don’t Do This” *Inc.* - <https://www.inc.com/justin-bariso/how-emotionally-intelligent-people-handle-criticism-they-dont-do-this.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Allen P. Ross, “Proverbs,” Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Proverbs–Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Wayne Jacobsen and Clay Jacobsen, *Authentic Relationships: Discover the Lost Art of “One Anothering”* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)