

Lenten Devotional Reflection

1 April 2020 (Lent Day 31)

Scripture: Hebrews 12:3-13 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

³ Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners,^[a] so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children—

‘My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
or lose heart when you are punished by him;

⁶ for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves,
and chastises every child whom he accepts.’

⁷ Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? ⁸ If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. ⁹ Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

¹² Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

Message

Discipline is very important to personal growth. My father said to me, “Chinese people value education very much. It is a father’s fault if he feeds his child but does not teach him and it is a teacher’s fault if he is not strict to his students.” I still remember these words well today.

“Headmistress, how many children do you have?” a parent asked me at the end of a school day 20 years ago. “1800.” I told her the answer without even thinking. (There were AM and PM schools in one primary school premise in those years, and I had 900 students in each school.) The author of Hebrews used the word “my child” as it was in Proverbs, to emphasise the relationship between teachers and students are actually a relationship between father and son. At that time, Jewish Christians had the new beliefs and also their old Jewish traditions. Therefore, they believed that it was the duty of a Jewish father to discipline his sons. However, they are human fathers who disciplined their children for a short time as seemed best to them, while Christians have a Father of spirits, and He is close with his children and disciplines his children with love.

There are always children who are stubborn, stupid and troublemaking when they are disciplined, Father has His own way to discipline us:

The first one is to reprove with words. In Matthew 16:13-23, after Peter declared Jesus as Christ, Son

of the living God, Jesus foretold his own sufferings and resurrection. Peter then took him aside and tried to stop him going to Jerusalem. Jesus then said to him, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” God forbids any chance that an evil to stir his children’s soul. The more He loves his children, the more serious he would reprove them.

The second one is to use the rod. That means one to discipline with action. I can still remember there was a naughty student being brought to me in an afternoon 30 years ago. With his parents’ consent, we decided to use physical punishment (it was allowed under the Education guidelines at that time.) We explained to him and made sure he understood the reason before letting the vice principal to execute the punishment. We took him into a small room and had his upper body lying on the desk. He screamed before the wooden ruler hit his hip. “It hurts!” he screamed after we beat him twice. In fact, everyone in the room had tears in their eyes at that moment. This child was adopted and left Hong Kong before he graduated. Before he left, we would like to give him a present. As he mentioned that he never wore a pair of leather shoes, we took him to a shop to buy. He chose the cheapest pair in the shop. He held the shoes in his arms and said, “they are good enough.” I heard him become an honest and gentle person who has a stable job and is able to contribute to the society now. Actually, a moderate physical punishment is good in discipline as you beat the child, but it is the father who hurts. That is love.

The rod and reproof make people discouraged and pain, but it also gives one wisdom (Proverbs 29:15). It is an act of love. “Discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time.” (Hebrews 12:11) However, God’s discipline leads us to abundant life and holy character which can bear the fruits of peace! This is all because of the love of the Father.

Reflection

1. Think about your relationship with God, if He is our Father in Heaven, are you willing to submit ourselves humbly to his discipline?
2. Do you have any experience when God disciplined you?
3. During the spread of the COVID-19 these days, worries, unpeaceful feelings, fear, doubts and even evil actions were exposed. Do you believe that fruits of peace and justice will be borne after the sufferings?

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