

Turning the Crap of Life, Into the Fruit of the Spirit Punishment or Testing?

Life Questions:

Are you struggling with something in your life that is causing you great distress, but you cannot determine if you are being punished or being tested? How can you know? What should be the outcome of this distress? How can you change your situation, or can you?

I am being tested. That is what everyone says when trials **come** their way. It is an easy way to get sympathy, after all, who doesn't feel compassion for someone taking a test in their life? But what about being punished? If someone told you that they were being punished by God for their actions, would you have sympathy for them? If you are like most people, you would probably say you would not. Why? Because when someone is punished, they did something wrong whereas when they are tested it is because they are being pushed, right?

Before you can answer that statement you have to understand the difference between the two. In our life growing up chances are you understood the difference between when you had a test in front of you at school and when your parent(s) or some other authority was standing over you with a belt about to administer corporate punishment. But in life, and in the biblical walk, it can prove to be a lot more difficult to determine which is going on and how to handle it.

Life Question: Take an event in your life that is happening right now and write down on a sheet of paper whether you think it is a trial or punishment. Then read the lesson. Does your opinion change? In what way? How are you going to deal with it now that is different than when you started?

So, how do you know if God is punishing you?

1. God does punish

Deut 8:5

5 You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you. NKJV

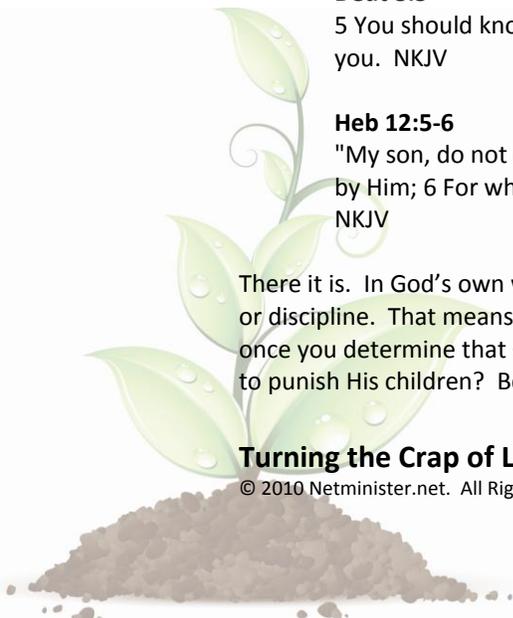
Heb 12:5-6

"My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." NKJV

There it is. In God's own word, he chastens us. The word for chasten means to instruct with punishment or discipline. That means, God punishes us. Anyone that tells you differently isn't reading His Word. So once you determine that God does punish us we need to know why He would. Why would a father want to punish His children? Because His children are doing something wrong.

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So we see from His word that God does punish, so the next question is why would He punish?

Recently there has been a rash of pastors who have been found out about. From homosexual affairs to twenty-plus year affairs, what has been done in secret is finding its way out into the open. How do you suppose that happens?

Generally, there is someone who is disgruntled with the situation, usually the person directly involved in the activity. Typically it is the other party, someone who doesn't think he or she is getting all that he or she should get, so direct action is taken to threaten and eventually out the person in the circumstance. Bottom line: you will get found out. History is filled with people who thought they had gotten away with something only to get caught. There is even a show on television called; *I Almost Got Away With It*.

ESPN has a special of shows called 30 for 30. They have one on the SMU football team of the early 1980's. A team that had a wealth of talent was apparently was being funded by the wealth of boosters. The university was put on probation twice for the same offense. Yet without admitting anything, the payments to players continued mostly uninterrupted. This problem continued from the early 80's until one fellow got upset. He was injured and couldn't play, and without his payment he decided that he would expose the financial shenanigans that were going on. He did. The end result was what is commonly known as the death penalty. The NCAA, the ruling body of athletics, decided to exercise its most potent weapon against this type of malfeasance, and removed the SMU football team from the playing field. Today people look back on that punishment aghast at how much it has damaged the program, virtually destroyed it for decades, but they all agree, the punishment of sanctions wasn't getting the attention of those doing the business enough to change things; therefore, more drastic measures were needed.

Such is the way we are with God. At first, punishment can seem like just a slap on the wrist, nothing really all that bad – in fact, we may not even realize it was a punishment. But gradually, the pain gets worse, until we have to purposefully ignore the evidence that we are being punished.

Without punishment, we would never change our behaviors. Corporate or capital depending on your stance, most people agree that punishment generally changes behavior to some extent. As time goes on you move from a slap on the wrist to eventually there is a punishment that will take your life. Why would we expect anything less from God?

So knowing that God does punish, the why He punishes us is to provide a method of changing our behavior. But how do we know our behavior is wrong? Through His Word!

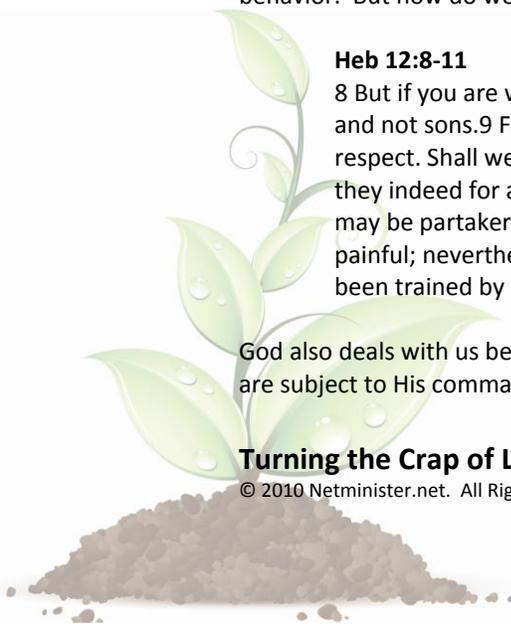
Heb 12:8-11

8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.¹¹ Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

God also deals with us because we are His children. We are punished to stop the behavior, because we are subject to His commands, His word the bible. But the punishment is to make us righteous, that means

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doing His word and will. It is the training the way God wants us to act and react to the things of life, but mostly to following His guidance.

Only when we sit down and study God's word do we find the solutions to problems in our life. But we also find where we aren't exhibiting behavior indicative of Christ-likeness. Even behavior that is outright rebellion against God and His word. But, if you don't take time to spend in His word you will never know that.

2. God does allow tests/trials in our life

James 1:2-8

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.⁷ For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. NKJV

Here we are told that not only are trails coming, but that we should count it all joy. Notice the word fun is not in there. Trials are not fun! Some people, those generally not going through the trial like to act like you should almost have fun when trials come, NO! It says joy. So that is the first thing we should find in a trial is our joy.

The word for joy is calm delight and cheerfulness. That is the key to any trial, learning to deal with it for the end result not the moment. In the moment you are told it is major surgery, there is no joy; instead, that comes from seeing the end. When we are able to see the end result of a trial, a close place with Christ, then we can take that calm assurance that provides cheerfulness even in the midst of the most awesome of situations.

Life Question: Do you know people that face adversity but remain joyful throughout it? What makes them the way they are? Have you ever asked them how they can be?

Herein lays the problem of most people, why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? Well first of all, good is the definition we put on someone. According to His word, there is not one good. So in God's economy, the only one that is good is Christ. Now as Christians we are seen through Christ before God. Jesus makes intercession for us daily (and no I didn't put the scripture because I want you to go look it up!). Therefore, God allows trials (sickness, disaster, death, etc.) to come into our lives as a way of drawing us closer to Him. To look to Him for our dependence not to ourselves and that goes even for those that we think are good people.

There it is, the word everyone, regardless of your beliefs, your background anything you hate: patience. That is what a trial produces and we all hate it! Admit it, you do. I know you do. Ask anyone if they are praying for patience and they will look at you like you asked them if they were praying for a donkey to kick them in the face. It just isn't something that we readily look for daily. But it is the thing God seeks to grow within us.

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So often is the case we stop at the process of patience but we should continue. We should seek out God's wisdom to deal with the trial. And here is the simple part of knowing if you are doing the right thing: people think you aren't. Simple as that. If people around you tell you that they would handle this situation thusly, but the bible says different, go with the bible because that is the wisdom James is speaking of. When we have a need for help we should ask God, not for lottery tickets or how to best beat the system, you aren't getting that information from Him. But we should seek wisdom.

When you are sick, who do you go to? Not a mechanic. When you need help with a problem of life do you call on a plumber? What about when you need your house repaired, do you call a physicist? In all these situations, you would call someone else, why because you need someone with the knowledge to help you. You can make the problem worse on your own. Believe me I have done it many times myself. So when we need help we need the right person for the job. Plan and simple, God is the right person for every job. And He, not the plumber, the mechanic or the physicist is the one to call on for wisdom in trials.

3. The difference between trials and punishment.

That is the key, looking for wisdom. Looking for knowledge in a trial is the key. In punishment, we already have the knowledge, but we have chosen not to use it. Think about it in a standard way:

I know the speed limit. I drive a stretch of road almost daily. And every day I speed in excess of the speed limit. I know the speed limit, but I have chosen not to follow it. Maybe I have good reason, it is a long stretch of road that is flat, not potholes and few houses. My justification is good and maybe even reasonable, but still the sign is there telling me what my speed should be. And every day I just fly right past it without a care in the world. Until one day on this beautiful stretch of road there is a police officer who takes umbrage to my speed. He kindly asks me to pull over as he would like to have a chat about the finer points of speeding. Once I am pulled over I plead my case to the officer, but the officer points to the sign, looks at my driver's license and realize that I drive this road daily and he assumes correctly that I speed every day. The rule is set, the sign is there I have chosen to ignore it. Maybe I have even gotten warning about police in the area before but I have ignored them. Not showing wisdom I have continued to demonstrate a behavior that is inappropriate so the police officer is left with no alternative but to issue me a citation. So my behavior, something I knew was wrong but still continued doing, has costs me. The fine is levied and I have to pay it or I risk a greater punishment. If I do not pay the fine, eventually the police will escort me to jail and I will pay the full amount plus.

Which leads to core of the question, what is the difference. Simply put, when God punishes us, He is attempting to change our behavior – well in the same aspect – when He allows trials in our life He is attempting to change our behavior. The foundation of change is the key to which He is allowing or doing in your life. By the way, God punishes us but He allows trials in our life. There is a difference of which one moves Him to action – punishment. So wouldn't you suppose that He takes a point of punishing us to move us quickly back to the place we need to be to grow?

How do you know for sure? You need to spend time in God's word. Are you following the things He commands you to as a believer? For example, you cannot be lying all the time and expect that God is allowing a trial for you. Why because you don't have the word in you. How could He expect to know you would learn anything when one of the simplest you haven't mastered yet, do not tell a lie. What about if you worship money/fame/power? How can you possibly be in a position to grow closer to God when you have another god (small g) in front of Him. He commands us to have no other gods before Him – power,

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fame, money, pride are all things that are ahead of His place in our life. When we are worshipping at that altar, how can we worship at His?

Lastly, you cannot be being tested if you are out of God's will for your life. If you are engaging regularly in behavior that is unbiblical or that is strictly forbidden (i.e., lying, stealing, cheating on your spouse, lusting after other people, murdering) then it is that God is attempting to move you back into the right place in your life. Don't believe me?

Luke 15:11-24

Then He said: "A certain man had two sons.¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood.¹³ And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.¹⁴ But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.¹⁵ Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.¹⁶ And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'"

²⁰ "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.²³ And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry;²⁴ for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

NKJV

Along with Noah, this is probably one of the most taught stories behind the birth and death of Jesus. A son goes to His father and asks for what is his according to custom. What does the father do? Does he scream about all he has given the son? Will the father threaten the son, saying you have what you deserve? Nope, as a matter of fact he gives him the inheritance. Notice, he just gives it to him. No arguing no fussing, nothing he gives it to the son. The father knows full well what the son will do with it. But still he gives it to him. Ever wonder why God allows us to just go off on our own without some kind of a fight? Because we should know better. A certain action is going to have a certain result.

When you have sex outside of marriage, something God tells us not to do, isn't because He doesn't want us enjoying that aspect of life but that He is trying to protect us from doing something stupid. Sex outside of marriage can create a human being, disease can be transmitted, but most of all bonds are broken and lives are changed forever. There are results to our actions.

This son should have known better. He lived with his father all his life so he knew the kind of work he did. Are you living close enough to God to know the kind of work he is doing? Do you see Him working everyday? Have you stopped to thank Him for all the things He has given you? And do you give Him the

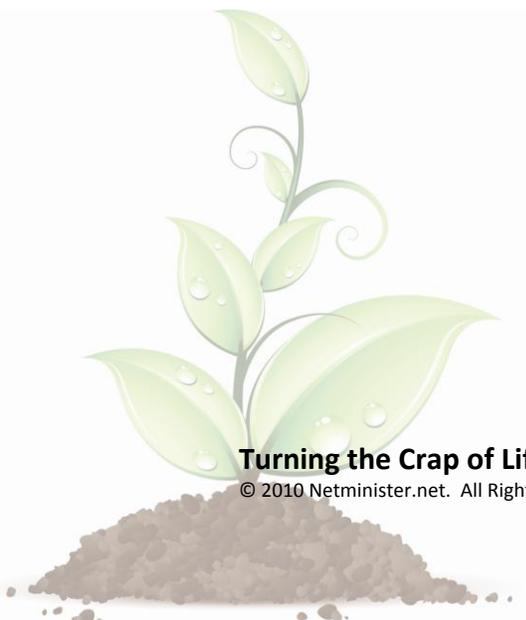
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credit? If you answered no to these questions, there is a good chance that God is looking to change your behavior – and given that you aren't following His word, chances are you are headed for a rough spot. Change that today!

Get into His word, pray and seek to know the places you are missing His will and His commands for your life. And, be willing to change the behaviors He is pointing out to you. And realize that others may make fun of you for your changes, but do not let that make you go back. Remember, fear God not man.

Final Analysis: This lesson took a while to compile. Not because the information was hard to find or the scripture was difficult but to the contrary. I have found many areas in my own life that are being pointed to with this study that I was personally putting into the trials category, that I am re-evaluating. I would sincerely hope you do the same. While every lesson points out of an area of concern I see, it is with ones like this that I find the most influence of God's word. And it points to areas that need to be addressed and changed immediately. Like the prodigal son, I need to go home instead of taking the punishments that come from my behavior. Come home, take your bible – read it as often as you can. Daily is great, more than once a day is wonderful. Dive into it and find His truth, deal with the punishments by changing the behavior. Then learn from the trials and help others to do the same.



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