

# Divine Discipline

by Zac Poonen

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*God's discipline is necessary to purge us of our crookedness and to shatter our self-sufficiency and self-confidence, ultimately leading to a quiet growth in grace and character.*

**Scripture:** Hebrews 12:10

**Topics:** "Divine Discipline", "Trusting God"

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## Description

Zac Poonen discusses the theme of Divine Discipline through the life of Jacob, emphasizing that God used severe chastening over twenty years to prepare Jacob for His promises. Jacob's experiences with Laban, who mirrored his own shrewdness, served to refine his character and teach him trust in God rather than relying on his cleverness. Despite facing challenges, including marrying Leah instead of Rachel and dealing with barrenness, Jacob continued to scheme until he was ultimately confronted with the consequences of his actions. Poonen highlights that God's discipline is purposeful and tailored to each individual's needs, aiming to cultivate trust and reliance on Him. The sermon concludes with the reminder that while discipline may be painful, it leads to growth in grace and character.

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## Transcript

In order to fulfil His promises to Jacob, God had to discipline him severely. Jacob required twenty years of Divine chastening to come to the point where he would accept God's highest for his life. First of all, God placed alongside another shrewd person. Laban was just as smart as Jacob, and as they lived together and came into close contact with each other, plenty of friction was generated and some of Jacob's rough edges were rubbed off. God knows whom to place us with in order to purge us of our crookedness. God measures out His disciplines to us, according to our individual need; and He makes all things work together for our good, even when He places us alongside someone like Laban - provided we don't rebel against God's providences. Many people have learnt sanctification through God leading them to marry someone just like themselves. "The sparks fly when iron strikes iron" (Prov. 27:17-LB) - but it sharpens both pieces of iron! Jacob, as last, begins to reap what he had sown. All his life he had been cheating others. Now he gets cheated himself. He goes through his wedding ceremony, thinking he is marrying Rachel, but discovers the next morning that he has actually married Leah! He had met his match in Laban! He now gets a taste himself of the bitter medicine that he had been doling out to others. God does not discipline without a purpose or arbitrarily. He knows what dosage each person needs and gives accordingly. With the merciful, God shows Himself merciful; and with the stubborn, He shows Himself stubborn (Psa. 18:25). He knows how to deal with every Jacob.

Jacob's problems were not yet over. After fourteen years of hard work, he obtained Rachel, only to discover that she was barren. God was merciful and finally gave Jacob a child through her, but even this brings no change in Jacob. He still cannot trust God, but continues to scheme. He next plans to rob Laban of his property. Jacob was clever. He knew all the tricks of the trade, and he knew how to get the best of Laban's cattle. How long God had to wait before Jacob learned to trust in Him and forsake his own human ingenuity. It is the same problem that God has with many of His children today. He is not impressed by our cleverness. He waits for us to see the folly of all that, before He can use us to fulfil His will. We find Jacob finally scheming to run away from Laban. He is tired of living with his father-in-law and wants to go away. But when he does run away, he finds that he has only jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. He hears that Esau is approaching him with a large army and that Laban is pursuing him from the rear. The one who tries to escape God's disciplines finds that it is not an easy task. If Jacob had left the matter in God's hands, God would have released him from Laban in His own way. But Jacob had not learned to trust God yet.

Finding himself hedged in and his life in danger, Jacob now begins to pray. He is quick to remind God of His promises made at Bethel (Gen. 32:9-12). But prayer alone is not sufficient for Jacob. He has to scheme too. He thinks up a clever plan of saving part of his company at least - just in case God lets him down. How very much like those who talk of trusting God and "living by faith," but all the time have some earthly source of security to fall back upon just in case faith alone does not work! Jacob was indeed very much like us. And how often we find, as Jacob found when he met Esau, that our fears were unfounded, that there was no need to have schemed and worried and doubted God. Esau's heart was in God's hands, and God could turn it in whichever direction He chose. "When a man is trying to please God, God makes even his worst enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7-LB). God had told Jacob clearly that He would take care of him. But Jacob could not believe God's promise. Jacob had twenty long and painful years of chastening under God's hand. We are not given all the details of what Jacob underwent - but he must have had a very rough time. It must have been physically exhausting too - working and sleeping out in the open, exposed to the sun and the dew and the rain. But all this discipline was necessary, in order to shatter Jacob's self-sufficiency and self-confidence. Only in later years, when he looked back, would he be able to appreciate what God took him through - not now. "God's correction is always right and for our best good, that we may share His holiness. (But) being punished isn't enjoyable while it is happening - it hurts! But afterwards, we can see the result, a quiet growth in grace and character" (Heb. 12:10, 11-LB).

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