

## Loving Discipline

**No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11).**

**Scripture:** Hebrews 12:7-17

**Song:** “God Works in a Mysterious Way”

Several years ago, I worked as an after-school teacher at an urban ministry. One of the hardest parts of my job was setting firm boundaries for the kids in my classroom. Knowing the tough things most of them had been through, I struggled to follow through with promised consequences when they disobeyed. But my supervisor encouraged me to stick with it, reminding me that one of the most loving things I could do was to set and stick to firm boundaries, which would teach the kids personal discipline.

That lesson helped me see God’s discipline in a new light. Hebrews 12 tells us that God disciplines us for our good because He loves us as His children. He allows us to suffer consequences for our disobedience—not because He is angry but because He wants us to change and grow, that we might share in His holiness and enjoy the outcomes of righteousness and peace.

The fact that God has chosen us doesn’t mean He gives us everything we want. It does mean He is always at work, nudging us closer to becoming more like Him.

**Father,** thank You for Your loving discipline. I want to submit to You today, even if it’s not easy. In Jesus’ name, amen.

September 12–18. **Ruth Anne Burrell** lives in the Kansas City area, where she enjoys finding new coffee shops, trying out new recipes, and dreaming up new stories to tell.

## Master Deceiver

**Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please . . . give me your blessing”** (Genesis 27:19).

**Scripture:** Genesis 27:18-29

**Song:** “Just as I Am”

According to *National Geographic*, blue jays are some of the most talented deceivers in the animal kingdom. By changing their own call to imitate hawks, they are able to scare away other birds and gain unchallenged access to bird feeders for an easy meal.

Jacob proved to be a master deceiver as well. He schemed with his mother to deceive his father. Dressing up as his brother and lying repeatedly to his father, Jacob claimed the blessing that belonged to Esau. He even invoked the Lord’s name to aid in his deceit, claiming that the Lord had helped him find game quickly. Unlike the blue jay that, at worst, cheats a few birds out of a meal, Jacob’s deceit left a trail of damage, severely injuring his relationships.

Despite all this, Jacob was chosen by God, and he indeed received God’s blessing. Culture coaches us to think we gain blessing from God based on the good we do, but Jacob’s life is a testament to the fact that receiving God’s blessings is based in faith and God’s purposes, not in our own merit. Jacob deserved punishment, but God was merciful and blessed him anyway. God chose him anyway. Today we too can know God’s blessing as we place our trust in Jesus, who took the punishment we deserved and offered us grace instead.

**Father,** You are more gracious than we deserve. Thank You for loving us and for saving us despite our many shortcomings. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## The Best Blessing

**[Esau said,] “The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob”** (Genesis 27:41).

**Scripture:** Genesis 27:30-41

**Song:** “Satisfied”

While I grew up, my family traveled each summer to a small town in the Rocky Mountains. And most years we hiked to the top of a nearby mountain. I was accustomed to my Kansas home’s low elevations, so the mountain’s altitude made parts of the hike almost unbearable. Halfway up, though, the trees would clear, providing a gorgeous view of the valley below—a reminder of all the other good and beautiful things I was prone to miss when I focused on my aching lungs and weary feet.

Esau’s life wasn’t always easy. In a moment of desperation, he bartered his birthright for a bowl of stew and later was tricked out of his blessing as the firstborn son. But to me the saddest part of his story is that he was so focused on revenge that he was counting down his father’s remaining days. Esau’s father still loved him. Yet all he could see was what he’d lost.

In this broken world our feet will grow weary, and at times it may be hard to keep going with the weight of hurt and betrayal. While it’s healthy to mourn loss, if we let our grief or anger consume us, we’ll miss the good that remains. Our Father is still with us, and our relationship with Him is our most valuable blessing.

**Father**, forgive me for missing out on what You want me to see and be. Satisfy me with Your love. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Mercy from the Mess

**God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all** (Romans 11:32).

**Scripture:** Romans 11:25-32

**Song:** “And Can It Be”

When Alexander Fleming went on holiday in 1928, he left a stack of dirty petri dishes in his lab. Upon his return, he saw that most of them had been contaminated by bacteria, save for one area where mold was growing. It turned out, that particular mold could kill a wide range of bacteria. It became known as penicillin, the world’s first naturally occurring antibiotic drug discovered because someone accidentally left unwashed dishes lying around.

Often the messes we make seem like just that: big messes. Yet Romans 11 reveals that God, in His distinctly mysterious way, can use our messes to display His mercy. In the case of today’s Scripture, the apostle Paul tells us that Israel’s hard-heartedness became an opportunity for God to display His mercy to the Gentiles. In turn, God’s mercy to the Gentiles would lead to an eventual opportunity for Him to display His mercy again to Israel.

We serve a God whose grace is so big that even our sin and disobedience can become opportunities for Him to reveal His redemptive love and power. Instead of hiding our shame from Him, let’s confess our sin (1 John 1:9) and surrender our messes to Him that He might redeem them.

**Father,** I want to walk in obedience to You. But I pray that even when I am disobedient, You will bring glory to yourself through Your great mercy toward me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Celebrating His Goodness

**Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced, you his servants, the descendants of Abraham, his chosen ones, the children of Jacob (Psalm 105:5-6).**

**Scripture:** Psalm 105:1-11

**Song:** “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty”

A couple of years ago, my close friend had a cancer scare. When her test results came back negative, she didn't just sigh in relief and move on. She took time to thank God and to celebrate the good news—first with ice cream and then later with the purchase of a beautiful new dress. The idea was that anytime she saw or wore the dress, for years to come, it would serve as a visual reminder of what God had done.

When was the last time you celebrated something God did? So often we come to Him with our fears and our pain but forget to return with thanks and praise when He answers our prayers. The writer of Psalm 105 emphasizes the importance of remembering what God has done and praising Him for it. Every line exudes joy as the psalmist glories in all that God has done for the people of Israel, His chosen ones.

The Lord has done so much for us. He found us when we were lost, gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins, and is working even now to redeem every part of our brokenness. In Christ we are His chosen ones; let's celebrate and spread the news of all He has done for us!

**Father,** today I will remember to thank You and to celebrate Your many blessings. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Steadying Our Hearts

**“Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me. . . . But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper’”** (Genesis 32:11-12).

**Scripture:** Genesis 32:3-12

**Song:** “God’s Promise”

Recently I took a class on trauma. We learned the importance of establishing safety and stabilization before working through traumatic memories. Because of how trauma affects our brains, we need a stable foundation before dealing with the pain of the past. Our professor suggested that one helpful tool could be to create a box, journal, or scrapbook of good things in life. Then when painful memories come and everything feels shaky, this collection of good things can act as a reminder of the truth.

In Genesis 32, Jacob was afraid that he was about to enter a battle. He had not forgotten Esau’s threat to kill him, and he had so much more to lose now than when he’d left Canaan. Jacob’s terror was evident in his preparations. However, we read in verses 9-12 that he stopped to do something far more effective than stressing: he prayed, admitting his fear and reminding God—and himself—of the promises the Lord had made to him.

Jacob’s prayer provides a wonderful example for us to follow when we are facing a difficult situation. By surrendering our fears to the Lord and reminding ourselves of His character and promises, we have a safe and stable foundation for times of trouble.

**Father,** in those areas that seem overwhelming today, I will remember who You are and what You have promised in Your Word. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## What's in a Name?

**The man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome” (Genesis 32:28).**

**Scripture:** Genesis 32:22-32

**Song:** “I Will Sing the Wondrous Story”

Most expectant parents spend weeks or even months agonizing over what to name their child, and perhaps rightly so, considering the potential impact a name can have. Crazy as it seems, recent studies on the impact of names suggest that our names may affect the career we end up in, how much people trust us, how many dates we go on, and even the shape of our faces!

In Genesis 32, we see the significance of a name play out. When Jacob's wrestling opponent asks what his name is, Jacob owns the identity he has carried his entire life: he is Jacob, the deceiver. But God calls him to be something else, something new. Instead of defining him by his past actions, God defines Jacob by a new identity in relationship to Him. Jacob is no longer the deceiver, but the one who has struggled with God and overcome.

When God chooses us, He gives us each a new identity. He doesn't define us by what we have done in the past but by our relationship to Him and by who He calls us to be. In Him we are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6:6-7) but chosen children.

**Father,** thank You for choosing me, redeeming me, and giving me a new name through Christ. Please teach me to walk faithfully in this new identity as Your child. In Jesus' name, amen.