

CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY NINE

When God's Discipline Strikes

1 Corinthians 10:1–13

Warnings should be specific and brief. They are meant to linger in our minds as lessons that should never be forgotten.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

So far, we've clung to hope through some severe storms—debilitating sickness, surprising tests, life-altering losses, cruel mistreatment, intimidating giants, and, in our previous study, painful thorns.

Through each gale, we've set our anchor in God who holds us fast—helping us to endure *and* to mature. That's our hope, isn't it? Trials are training ground for wisdom. They are pathways to spiritual highlands known only by those who dare to climb.

Trials aren't random events with no meaning; rather, they are part of God's ultimate plan to restore all things. For this reason, Joseph could say with confidence to his abusive brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good" (Genesis 50:20). Paul assured us, "God causes *everything* to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them" (Romans 8:28, emphasis added).

Let's hang on to this hope in this *Searching the Scriptures* study as we consider how God disciplines His sinning children—which sometimes includes us. His discipline has a purpose: ***not to harm but to produce something good in us and through us in our world.***



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When God's Discipline Strikes

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Tune your heart to hear God's message in His Word. Let the following prayer prompt your own supplication.

Father, I invite You to shine Your light into every corner of my life. Reveal any fear that keeps me from fully trusting You, any hidden sin that weakens my love for You, and any rebellious attitude that resists Your grace. I open myself completely to Your loving correction. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Our passage comes from Paul's correspondence with the church in Corinth. In his letters, Paul took on a parental tone with his readers, calling himself, "your father in Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 4:15). As any parent, Paul loved his spiritual children, but he was concerned.

While God had richly blessed the church with spiritual gifts and fine Bible teachers, the believers had become proud; and their pride opened a gateway to all sorts of sins—sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, abuse, drunkenness, and swindling one another (5:11). The church was no different than the surrounding decadent culture—a moral mess!

Paul exposed these sins in his letters. His purpose wasn't to shame the wayward believers but to lovingly "warn [them] as my beloved children" (4:14). Paul's warning culminated in a sobering lesson from Israel's idolatry that he didn't "want [them] to forget" (10:1).



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Observation: Warning from the Wilderness

Paul often used literary techniques such as repetition and contrast to build his point, and we can use our *Searching the Scriptures* skills to observe these techniques in *1 Corinthians 10:1–5*.

Read the passage and notice the repeated phrase, “all of them.” Then, find the contrasting phrase, “most of them.” Mark these phrases or highlight them. In the chart below, write down the blessings *all of the Israelites* experienced as Paul listed them. To appreciate the historical background of Paul's reference, read the Old Testament account in the right-hand column. In the last row, write down what *most of them* experienced despite their many blessings.

| Phrase | Blessings the Israelites Experienced | Backstory |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>All of them</i> (10:1a) | | <i>Exodus 13:21–22</i> |
| <i>All of them</i> (10:1b) | | <i>Exodus 14:21–29</i> |
| <i>All of them</i> (10:2) | | <i>Exodus 14:31</i> |
| <i>All of them</i> (10:3) | | <i>Exodus 16:2–31</i> |
| <i>All of them</i> (10:4) | | <i>Exodus 17:1–7</i> |
| <i>Most of them</i> (10:5) | | <i>Numbers 14:20–23</i> |



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The Lord showered blessings upon His people in the barren wilderness: guidance from the cloud, protection through the sea, sustenance through daily manna, and water from the rock. And yet God was not pleased with most of them. Why?

Read 1 Corinthians 10:6–10. In the chart below, note Paul’s explanation of the Israelites’ sin, and then read the backstory in Exodus and Numbers in the right-hand column.

| Sin | Israelites’ Sin | Backstory |
|-------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Idolatry (10:6–7) | | Exodus 32:1–6 |
| Immorality (10:8) | | Numbers 25:1–9 |
| Testing the Lord (10:9) | | Numbers 21:4–6 |
| Grumbling (10:10) | | Numbers 16:41–50 |

This is quite a list of sins! No wonder “God was not pleased” (1 Corinthians 10:5).

Everybody was blessed . . . but. The contrast was meant to be jarring. All of them received God’s blessings, but most of them failed to please God and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. It’s a serious warning. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Theology within the Warning

In the interpretation phase, we use our *Searching the Scriptures* tools to unlock the meaning of the passage. Considering the theological context of the passage helps us better understand what was at stake and the reason for the severity of God’s discipline.



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God designed the journey of the Israelites from Egypt to the promised land to illustrate His plan of redemption for the whole human race. God wanted His people to model faith through their trust and worship. Yet instead of offering God a bouquet of devotion, a weedy infestation of grumbling grew in the people's hearts. Worse still, they shunned God and embraced idols.

How did the Israelites' sin disrupt God's plan? Why was it so vital for God to correct them?

Looking back, we see hints of the gospel in the Israelites' journey. God's deliverance and the Israelites' baptism "as followers of Moses" symbolized our deliverance from sin and baptism into Christ (*Romans 6:3–4; 1 Corinthians 10:1–2*). What did God's provisions of the "spiritual food" of manna and "spiritual water" from the "spiritual rock" symbolize (*1 Corinthians 10:3–5*)? How did these provisions point to Christ? For help with the answers, consult your resources, including *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.

What comparisons did Paul make between God's blessings for the Israelites and His spiritual blessings for Christians? What lesson was Paul's warning teaching (*10:6–10*)?



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The *magnitude* of God's blessings amplifies the *seriousness* of Paul's warning. Paul wrote, "These things happened as a warning to us, *so that we would not crave evil things as they did*" (1 Corinthians 10:6, emphasis added). What discipline was Paul concerned might happen to the Corinthian believers if they didn't repent and change—a discipline which Paul may have been alluding to in *11:20–30*?

Paul's warning lit a fire in his original readers to confess their sin and change. (Read about their repentance in *2 Corinthians 7:8–11*.) It does the same for us. What is the first step we can take to deal with the sins in our life that displease the Lord? Let's return to the Israelites' example to find the way.



Correlation: God's Provision for Sin

Paul wrote that the Israelites who tested the Lord "died from snakebites" (1 Corinthians 10:9). Read the full account in *Numbers 21:4–9*. Write down how *God provided a way of restoration* for those He disciplined.



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According to *John 3:13–17*, in his nighttime visit with Nicodemus, Jesus compared Himself to the bronze snake lifted up in the wilderness. What hope did Jesus offer those who recognize their sin and turn to Him?

Jesus Himself and His sacrificial death for our sins represents the singular hope for all sinners. Cling to that hope today as you apply this study.

God's plan was so full of grace. Though His discipline was severe, all people needed to do was look at the bronze snake and they would be healed. If you've never come to know the Lord Jesus, look to the cross. Turn to Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Dealing with Sin at the Cross and Beyond

Meaningful Bible study always leads to application. If you are sensing God's discipline because of sin in your life, take the important step of confession right now. This simple prayer may express your heart:

Heavenly Father, I have sinned against You like the ancient Israelites sinned in the wilderness. Remove Your hand of discipline from me. I look to the cross now as I did when I first trusted Christ as my Savior. Lead me in Your good way. Thank You for the forgiveness You offer and the new life I can experience through Your Son. In His name, amen.

What fruit of repentance can you show? Have you offended someone who needs your apology? Do you need pastoral direction or Christian counseling to find freedom from habits that may be binding you? What help from the Holy Spirit can you seek? Who can you talk with?



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For His sinning children, God offers restored joy and a fresh start—which is the *good* His discipline brings. Close this study with a sense of gratitude for the Father's loving discipline by remembering the benefits and thanking the Lord for each one.

- 1) *God's discipline confirms that you are His child.* “The LORD disciplines those he loves” (Hebrews 12:6).
- 2) *God's discipline deepens your spiritual life.* “Shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever?” (12:9).
- 3) *God's discipline is always for our good.* “God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness” (12:10).
- 4) *God's discipline is painful but profitable.* “No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way” (12:11).

God cares enough to correct us and set us on His path. That's something for which we can be eternally grateful.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for loving me enough to do whatever You think is necessary to hold me near and warn me of the dangers of sin. The pain of discipline is difficult to bear, but it is not nearly as severe as the consequences of sin. So, do Your will in my life, correct me when necessary, and keep me on Your peaceful path. In Jesus' name, amen.

