

The Lord's Negative Prodding

Scripture: Acts 17:30–31; Hebrews 12:5–11; Revelation 3:19

Code: B120823

The Lord employs a variety of methods to bring about repentance in the lives of His people. Last time we looked at three positive means He uses to prod believers away from sin and back to His righteous standard.

But if the knowledge of God's Word, His goodness to us, and the nagging guilt of a troubled conscience fail to bring us to repentance, God has other ways of leading us there. Let's look at a couple negative ways He prods us back into a right relationship with Him.

First, He disciplines us. Revelation 3:19 says, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent." Do you know why God rebukes and chastens us? He sometimes puts us through crises to bring us to change. That happened in my life.

As a young man, I never would have denied a belief in God, and yet in my heart I was rebelling against what I knew He wanted in my life. God had tried knowledge, sorrow for sin and then goodness. Finally, He got to chastisement, and it worked.

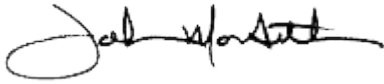
After being thrown at seventy-five miles per hour from a car as it flipped and rolled, and then sliding on my backside approximately 100 yards down the highway, scraping off some sixty-four square inches of my back a half-inch deep, I knew God was dealing with me. My body was covered in abrasions and bruises. No one else in the car was injured, and I was able to get up and walk to the side of the road. It was a miracle that I was alive. Standing there immediately after the accident, I thought, "I know why this happened. I have been trying to ignore God's calling, and He is making sure He has my attention." Right then I said, "From now on, I'll do whatever You want me to do." That was the change in my life. That's when I really turned around.

While that kind of prodding from the Lord can be uncomfortable and disruptive, we need to consider the reminder of Hebrews 12:5-11, that He only disciplines those whom He loves. So even as He uses hardship, difficulty, and struggle to steer us back to His righteousness, it ought to give us assurance that we truly belong to Him.

Another negative way that God brings people to repentance is by warning us of judgment to come. Acts 17:30-31 says, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world." The message of judgment is all over Scripture, and it must be preached because God designed judgment to lead us to repentance. God placed guilt within the Israelites' hearts and chastised them with wars, famine, and exile. He displayed His goodness to them by bringing them back to their homeland after the chastening. And He preached judgment to them through the prophets. God had tried to prod the Israelites with knowledge through the Old Testament and then He sent Jesus to perform miracles in their faces. Jesus preached judgment to the Jews in Matthew 21, but they didn't repent.

Ignoring the prodding of the Lord puts you directly in the path of His judgment. Instead, you need to heed His warnings, root out the sin in your life, and repent. Unless you're regularly mortifying your sin, you can't have strong confidence in your salvation.

And that's where we'll pick it up next week.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John MacArthur". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

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