**August 9, 2015**

**Proverbs 4:20b-21**

**Discipline and Affirmation**

**CIT:** We must have disciplined ears, eyes, and hearts toward God’s Word so that we can share the road to eternal life, salvation with others.

**Purpose:** God calls us through His Word to have disciplined ears, eyes, and hearts, that we might share His life-giving power with others!

**Introduction**

We’re closing our series in Proverbs this morning. This summer, we’ve been looking at Proverbs as “A Guide to Life.” Last month I got to share with you how God’s Word (Spoken, Written, and Living) ***IS*** the guide to life (ultimately spiritual and eternal). We were in Proverbs 4:20-22, listen to God’s Word’s again (read).

We really focused on the “bookends” to this passage “My son…life and health to one’s whole body,” but the central part of these verses demonstrates a pattern of discipline for our lives. In fact Proverbs has much to say on the subject of our final message in this series, “Discipline and Affirmation.”

What we see from these verses is God’s plan of discipline (as well as affirmation) for us through our ears, eyes, and heart.

***Transition:***

Let’s look at the first of these three areas of discipline, the ears (re-read v20b).

1. **Prov 4:20b – Discipline and Affirmation: Ears**

Discipline has several facets. The first of which is instruction. Any teacher will tell you that discipline in fact begins with instruction or teaching, with the setting of rules (as in a classroom setting for example). This is done primarily through verbal instruction. That is why, after the Lord’s direction for us to “pay attention to what he says,” we are further advised to “turn our ears to His words.” God’s instruction and teaching, however, is not merely a set of “class rules” to live by, but they are the guide to life (physical/practical, but most importantly spiritual and eternal)!

Earthly discipline is established at the earliest age through instruction by parents to children. 1) don’t touch the light socket, 2) don’t pull up on the wobbly furniture, 3) don’t pull the dog’s hair or the cat’s tail, 4) don’t drink the bath water/the bath tub is not the toilet, and 5) don’t eat food off of the floor…unless it’s been there less than 10 seconds. Although parents set practical guidelines (they give us a practical guide to life), Christian parents are called to establish more. They are called to establish Christian discipline.

Listen to Proverbs 6:20-23 (read). So why is parent’s Biblical instruction so important? Because it is the way (Heb=path) to life! In John 14:6 Jesus tells us he is “the way, the truth, and the life” and in John 8:12 He tells us he “is the light of the world.” The Bible tells us that the world is a dark place. Parents, your children do not have to walk in darkness! It is God’s design for you to be their primary instructors, establishing for them a pattern of biblical discipline (thus showing them the way and the light). The verses that follow Prov 6:20-23 are concerned solely with adhering to parent’s (God’s) instruction to avoid adultery, but the words in these verses are strikingly similar to Deut 6:4-9. In this passage, the Lord through Moses instructs the people on how they are to teach their children. The purpose in following the Lord’s instruction is disclosed in Deut 6:24 (read). The purpose, much like in Prov 6, is life!

Parent’s your instruction points your children to life! Read Prov 4:13. You must teach your children to cling to God’s life-giving instruction in His Word.

Read Prov 10:17. You must teach them to cling to God’s discipline, given through His Word because it is the way to life. But you can’t teach what you don’t know (repeat). If you do not “heed” it, you are (as v17 says) “leading others astray.” How are you instructing your children? I know we all love our children, but are you instructing them in biblical discipline, or something else? Does your instruction match God’s Word? Do you even know if it does?

Why is this so vital? Read Prov 15:10. You see, the opposite of God’s discipline being life itself, which is given through His Word, is true. This again is a life and death situation. I realized this several years ago, that Beth and I live in a “divided household” (not Auburn/Bama), in Christ or not. If you have unsaved Children you live in a mission field! Have you ever looked at it that way?

We’ve spoken about parent’s role, but what about children? For students, listen to Prov 15:5. This is also for adults w/ living parents…listen to their wisdom! Did you realize that the 5th commandment (Ex 20:12a) is, as Paul points out in Ephesians, the “first commandment with a promise” (read Ex 20:12b, all of Exodus 20:12 up). Why? As we have seen from Proverb after Proverb, when your parent’s discipline (instruction/teaching) comes from God’s Word…it is life!

I know it is the end of the summer, and there are many weary parents in here. Let me share a couple of “quick wins” Beth and I have experienced. 1) *Timmy’s Light Illustration* (Matt 5:16…never too early 2 learn)! 2) *Ruthie’s Rules* (week before last). And for parents of older children (maybe even some “grown” young adults), don’t lose heart. Keep speaking the life-giving Word of God to your children (even if they don’t seem to want to hear it…Isa 55:11).

**Point: Disciplined ears heed instruction and attain eternal life through it.**

* Parents, this is the end game, not so kids don’t get in trouble, not for college, career, but have eternity in mind as you establish a pattern of discipline through instruction.

***Transition:***

Once a pattern of discipline is established through instruction, we must move to the next level, personal discipline (read Prov 4:21a).

1. **Prov 4:21a – Discipline and Affirmation: Eyes**

As we age, discipline moves from solely other’s instruction to take on the form of self-discipline. (E.g.: we teach ourselves, can learn things ourselves). We move from solely instruction through our ears, but also to include our eyes. This does not mean that we ignore instruction and teaching through listening, that is what we are doing now, but we (as the author of Hebrews says) move from babies in need of milk to solid, spiritual food (Heb 5-6).

So is self-discipline, in general important? Yes, because God’s Word to us in Prov 4:21 tells us to (re-read). Is it consistent throughout Proverbs and God’s Word? Read Prov 13:18. Self-discipline in other aspects of your life is important. In fact, the second half of this verse tells us that a disciplined life leads to honor (re-read Prov 13:18b). And when we lead a disciplined life we don’t have to seek out praise, nor sing our own praises (read Prov 27:2). Leading a disciplined life leads to words of affirmation from others. Self-discipline is God’s guide to physical life and well-being, but more importantly it is our guide to Spiritual life and eternal well-being.

Prov 15:32 tells us (read). Do any of you “despise yourself? Yet many times, practically in our lives we fail to exercise discipline. One area this can be easily seen is in how we take care of ourselves. I’m a thin guy, but just between you and me, I’d eat fast food every day if there were no consequences (but there are). This is an area that is difficult for me.

Another practical area is in exercise. Anyone who has ever run distance has at least read that you are supposed to “do speed work” and “cross-train.” The funny thing about speed work for me is that I have what some call deceptive speed (I’m much slower than I look). As far as weight training, there is something called negatives. Negatives are not my favorite! I can do a bunch of pushups and pull-ups, I’m pretty good at it, and there is some value in it, but there is also value in negatives.

What are negatives? There is one 30 minute workout I do which is all negatives. I only do 50 pushups and 50 pull-ups in this routine. Each are in sets of 10. It is not difficult to do 10 push-ups, but when you go down slowly (1…2…3…up) it becomes much more difficult. In fact, I’m generally more sore after this than when I do a workout with a bunch of pushups and pull-ups in 30 minutes. Why do I do it? It increases strength and mobility. It’s not fun, but it takes discipline.

As important as physical discipline is to our daily lives, the Bible tells us that “physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (1 Tim 4:8). Prov 10:17 applied to parental discipline/instruction, but also applies to self-discipline. Our education staff (Brenda and her staff, Shaun and his staff, and Steve and his staff) all do an excellent job in teaching your children; however, it is YOUR job to be the primary teacher of your children. So again, is it important that you equip yourself? And again, you can’t teach what you don’t know. Others are counting on you, whether you are a parent, grandparent, great-grand. Not just that, but there is a lost and dying world all-around you who so desperately needs to hear and apply the discipline (instruction and teaching) of God’s Word to their lives. It is **THE** Way to life!

So exercising self-discipline in knowing God’s Word is consistent throughout Proverbs, but what about God’s Word? Read Psalm 1:1-3. Steve Farrar, in his book Point Man, says this is best translated “makes it His business.” Do you make knowing God’s Word your business? Not just David in this first Psalm, but Solomon in all his wisdom (ultimately the Lord through both of these men) tells us that we are to make it our business, we are not to let it out of our sight! But we do, all too often we take the Bible, lay it down on the counter, the table, or the shelf and don’t pick it up again until next Sunday. Why?

Read Prov 15:12. Many times we are convicted when we read the Word of God. We see in it things we need to change. The easiest way not to change is to avoid what might prompt us to do so, the Word of God. But we just saw from Prov 15:12 (re-read). What of mockers? Ps 1:4-6 (read). If we resent the Lord’s correction and discipline through being instructed in His Word we will be blown away.

Read Prov 12:1. Re-read. Why is it so stupid to avoid the Word of God? Read Prov 4:20a, 22. God’s Word brings life and salvation! Just as many of these other Proverbs say…it brings life and salvation!

**Point: Disciplined eyes remain focused upon God’s life-giving words of instruction.**

***Transition:***

One of the benefits of listening to instruction from God’s Word and viewing it consistently and intently with our eyes is that God then hides it in our heart. Read Prov 4:21b.

1. **Prov 4:21b – Discipline and Affirmation: Heart**

Once we’ve established self-discipline with God’s instruction thru His Word, it penetrates and implants itself in your heart. This verse is directly in line with Ps 119:11. What is the purpose of hiding God’s Word in our heart? So that we might not sin against Him!

Does this mean that discipline is no longer needed? Are we not still sinners saved by grace? This does mean, however, we change how we view God’s discipline. Read Prov 3:11-12. When we view God’s loving discipline in this way, it moves from discipline in a negative sense to one of the positive aspects of discipline, affirmation.

Beth and I have made it our habit of affirming our children after the less pleasant aspects of discipline have been applied. (Share the example of disciplining Timmy a few weeks ago, the follow-up phone call, and my special trip home at lunch that day). What we learned last month from the bookends of this passage is that we have a Heavenly Father who cares, loves, and provides for us. Parents, as you establish a pattern of discipline in your own homes, don’t forget to be generous with the affirmation as a part of this process. Follow your Heavenly Father’s example in your care, love, and provision!

When discipline in God’s Word causes penetration to the heart, not only does it change how we view His loving discipline, but it changes us (Read Rom 12:2). It changes the way we think, our world view (Read Prov 28:4). This is not just wisdom from Proverbs, but is repeated in the New Testament as well. Read Romans 1:32. Sadly this is where we are in our society today, praising those who are opposed to God and His will. So whom do you praise?

Discipline with our ears and our eyes leads to a disciplined and affirmed heart. A disciplined and affirmed heart leads to a steady and unshakable faith. A faith that, when you are a few months shy of turning 36 and the doctor tells you that you have cancer you are able to stand on the promises of God and not face that challenge as one who has no hope.

Some of you received an e-mail from me the second week of July. Some of you have heard some of what I wrote, but not all of you have had the opportunity to hear my heart, (Read a copy of the e-mail). It is solely through a consistent application of discipline in God’s Word that I was able to recall those powerful Words of His and stand without fear.

**Point: Disciplined hearts willingly receive correction, but also receive affirmation from God’s Word.**

**Conclusion**

God calls us through His Word to have disciplined ears, eyes, and hearts, that we might share His life-giving power with others! (Have quite an opportunity over the next week/Franklin Graham).

Repeat purpose, then: It is our responsibility, and we will be held to account for what we do with the Gospel! Listen to Paul’s words to the Ephesian elders as he leaves them for the last time in **Acts 20:26-27**. I used this text as my first and last to the church I pastored in Texas. Paul’s words have always struck me as a little odd. How can he say he is innocent of the blood of all men? Why would he say that? In Ezekiel 33:1-6 the Lord calls the prophet Ezekiel the “watchman.” He tells him in v’s 1-5 that if he sees the sword coming and warns the people and they perish, then their blood is on their own head. However, **Ezekiel 33:6 reads** (read v6). Their blood will be on his head if he fails to warn them. Paul was “a Jew among Jews,” a bit of a Bible scholar, and it wouldn’t shock me if he had this very passage in mind. To prophesy has a dual meaning: to foretell and to forth-tell. There is no more foretelling (outside of what is in Scripture), but we all have the responsibility to forth-tell. Are you upholding that responsibility? We don’t have to question whether we will be held to account for failing to share…God has already told us in His Word.

So have you established a pattern of discipline (ears, eyes, heart) in your life? Does it include God’s Word? You have a caring, loving and providing Heavenly Father who has given you His words to bring you life and complete healing/salvation. He has…(Purpose 1 more time). What will you do with His Life-giving power?