

Sermon Title: "Listen!" Series: "Skillful Living in God's World" July 13, 2014 Pastor Dave Sattler
Texts: Proverbs 3:11-12; 12:1; 13:1 & 24; 15:31-33; 19:20 Sources: NIV Life Application Bible & NIV Study Bible;
Commentaries: Koptak & Waltke; "The Wisdom of Proverbs" by Kidner; C.S. Lewis' "The Problem of Pain."

Review & Introduction <Slide>:

- I'm Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC and today we continue our series "Skillful Living in God's World" ... a journey through the book of Proverbs.
- As we learned last week, not everyone who possesses exceptional skill or brilliance also has wisdom.
- Our wisdom is limited; we need God's wisdom in order to live well.
- Like MP said, July 6/14, NSAC, Q: "The wise person is the one that orients their life around God."
- Proverbs is probably the most down-to-earth book in the entire Bible.
- It's meant to prepare God's people for the street and marketplace.
- Much of its content is like the warm advice you'd expect to receive growing up in a good family.
- In fact you'll notice a sort of parent-to-child tone to a lot of it: "My child, do not forget my teaching" (3:1), "My son, keep my words" (7:1), "Now then, my children, listen to me" (8:32).
- The purpose of the book of Proverbs is stated in Ch.1:2: "for attaining wisdom & discipline."
- Wisdom? Yes, I can see wanting to attain wisdom. But, discipline? Who wants that?!
• Readers are faced with 2 options:
 - 1) listen to God's advice, OR 2) carry on as if we need no advice at all.
- ILL - I am told when I was a toddler learning to speak, one of the first phrases I coined was:
 - Q: "I can do it myself!"
 - When it was time to brush my teeth, "I can do it myself!"
 - When I needed my pants pulled down to use the toilet, "I can do it myself!"
 - When I'd veered off into danger and needed reining in, "I can do it myself!"
 - I was taking correction or help from no one.
 - And well, things haven't changed much ...
- Like most men, my hearing's okay, but I don't listen that well.
- I'm quite good at nodding and saying "uh-huh" without truly listening to a word that's said!
- Proverbs 19:20 reminds:
 - **"Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise."**
- A chief way we grow in wisdom - or, God grows wisdom in us - is through discipline & correction.
- Therefore, we must learn to listen and accept instruction from God and others in order for wisdom to flourish in our lives.
- This is what it means to follow Jesus and become skillful at navigating in God's world.
- <Prayer>: "God, control me by Your Spirit and move me out of the way."

Text Outline:

- This morning we're going to 'drop in' on a number of texts in Proverbs related to our theme of discipline & correction.

1. <Slide> Disciplining Children

- We'll start with Proverbs 13:24:
 - **"Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them."**
- Proverbs has so many verses that talk about parents disciplining their children I couldn't avoid it!
- Yet even "careful" discipline is frowned upon in our world today.
- When the unspoken value is 'be friends with your kids' and 'let your kids be who they want to be,' how do parents "discipline"? What do we do with "the rod" today?
- This is such a touchy subject; I've seen actions 'disguised' as Christian discipline turn into destructive abuse with no "careful" love attached to it at all.
- On the other hand, I've felt the real pull ... not wanting to be 'the bad guy' ... 'caving' around my kids ... wanting to be that 'cool dad' ... and not correcting them on anything.

- This has not done them any favours. And ultimately isn't loving them at all.
- ILL - Disciplining children appears futile at times and it's almost always thankless.
 - And in my experience, it's really tough to get it right. And it's almost never fun.
 - If you're results-driven, it will be a challenge for you as a parent.
 - If you need to be appreciated by your kids, this too will drive you nuts, but it might drive you to be more God-dependent and humble - which, later in the message, you'll find is helpful.
- From Scripture, discipline is part of the role God gives to parents.
- And it is a primary way of transmitting values on to the next generation.
- Kids are a gift from God. They belong to Him. We raise our kids to 'let them go' and it's key when the time comes we've given them something to 'go with.'
- Correction, especially when they're younger, helps build a clear sense of right and wrong in our children - crucial in our world today.
- In this way, discipline is an act of love ... though kids I know it doesn't feel that way.
- ILL - Parents, what does "careful" discipline of your children look like?
 - Well, correction must never be delivered in anger.
 - It requires discernment to fit discipline to the individual child and the particular situation.
 - It must be clearly communicated so, as much as possible, depending on your child's age and maturity, the 'why' of your discipline is understood.
 - Discipline must be followed through on; idle threats are counterproductive.
 - Perhaps most important for parents is this: our words, our actions, and the witness of our lives will do more to impact our children than any value-shaping discipline we dole out.
- ILL - Kids, what does receiving discipline from your parents look like?
 - There is a certain independence that you're developing as youth & young adults that's good; it's part of growing up but this can also be destructive ... if you think you always know best and your heart remains hardened to discipline; and this can trip you up.
 - I want to encourage you: I know you don't want to hear this, but you would do well to trust your parents and listen to them more.
 - They love you dearly; they just might know some stuff too - mostly learned from their mistakes, but also from their wisdom; and you might want to cooperate a little more when they correct you ... even if it hurts your pride a little.
 - This is what it means to follow the Lord and His plan to guide you through your parents.

2. <Slide> The Lord's Discipline

- Now we turn to Proverbs 3:11-12:
 - **"My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves as a father the son he delights in."**
- Here there is a sense that discipline is synonymous with deep relationship and love.
- But why is this idea so foreign to us?
- ILL - Perhaps it's because in many relationships we have substituted tolerance for love in our day.
 - In our 'everyone's-right-everyone-wins' culture, tolerance suggests I am to accept everything about you and you are to tolerate everything about me ... even if it bugs you or isn't right.
 - And the notion of "rebuking" someone as part of loving them? - Totally 'offside.'
 - Most of us shy away from these kind of difficult conversations; we'd rather 'sweep things under the carpet' and quietly tolerate than correct someone.
 - But, reality is: true friendship-love has an element of correction to it.
 - Never calling a loved one on stuff is like as it says elsewhere in Proverbs, throwing fake "kisses" at an enemy (27:6). Tolerance is not real love.
- God disciplines His children because He "loves" them and "delights" in them.
- This concept is hard to fathom, probably because most disciplinarians we've witnessed are not very loving at all.
- But, God is love. Love cannot be separated from His nature.

- And when God disciplines, it's not because He enjoys inflicting pain, but because God is deeply concerned about our development.
- God's loving discipline shapes our transformation ... if we do not "despise" it.
- ILL - I have to say I have not particularly appreciated the Lord's discipline in my life. Who does?!
 - But God has used adversity - failure, rejection, loss in my life - as part of my growth.
 - Sometimes like this, God has identified flagrant sin in my life, that was probably evident to everyone else - just not me.
 - Other times, God has used painful circumstances to grow something in me - a quality or a gift I wasn't naturally born with that developed in that 'crucible.'
 - God has also used hard times to cause things to die in me - like that dream I was clutching onto that was not from Him and needed to be let go of.
 - In the midst of those situations, I didn't even know God was disciplining me at the time.
 - I was mostly just living life - reacting, mad at my troubles.
 - It wasn't until later when I looked back that I was able to catch a glimpse of God's work and His "delight" in me as His son.
- In our greatest disappointments, the productive questions are not 'how can I fix this?' or 'how can I get myself out?'; most of the time we can't control that.
- Rather, the BQ is: what is God shaping in me here and how will I respond?

3. <Slide> Responding to Correction

- Next let's look at Proverbs 12:1 and 13:1:
- There's a 'straight-up' reminder here on the importance of responding well to correction.
 - **"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates correction is stupid." "A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not respond to rebukes."**
- ILL - The writer of Proverbs describes 3 types of resistent people when it comes to wisdom:
 - First, the "simple" - those who live naively without ever seeing their need for wisdom.
 - There are the "fools" - those who make mild conscious decisions to live by their own wisdom.
 - Now, here's the "mocker" ... who blatantly baulks at God and His wisdom and announces his or her rebellious opinion to everyone, "I can do it!"
 - Mockers are experts. And sadly this is most of us.
 - As MP mentioned last week, in history through the enlightenment when human knowledge and capability grew exponentially, we began to "hate" correction, we've become deeply suspicious of and resistent to any truth we don't come up with ourselves.
- Truth is: there is no wisdom without correction.
- The Hebrew word translated here into english as "stupid" refers to one who comes from the animal kingdom. When it comes to correction, the 'ignoramus' is defensive, incorrigible, un-teachable.
- If you simply don't want to learn then years of schooling will teach you very little.
- ILL - Much of my life I have not heeded correction.
 - When someone has wanted to coach me, when I've tried fixing something, when I've attempted to put together virtually anything from IKEA ...
 - I have been resistent to instruction - defensive, easily hurt, even bitter.
 - Backing up our tent trailer, I have gotten rather angry when my lovely wife has graciously tried to guide me.
 - Why? Not getting it right on my own and needing help I feel is a sign of weakness.
 - And I hate that. I want to be seen as the expert. I want the glory.
 - It's like - emotionally & spiritually - I have kept myself stranded in perpetual 'toddlerhood':
 - 'I can do it myself' and 'I don't want no help from no one.'
- One commentator I read this week says, Q: "To follow Jesus is to be part of an educational process that invites God's correction and discipline with the vision of His transformation in one's life." - Waltke
- The wise person would do well to "heed correction." "Rebuke" can even be beautiful if we allow it.
- ILL - A little word to my 'recovery friends' this morning ...

- There is no recovery or healing or freedom without learning to respond well to correction.
- This is the pathway forward: mouth shut, the 'big-talk' must stop; and, before others and God, ears and heart open ... to listen and receive ... and change will come.

4. <Slide> Listening & Humility

- Finally we turn to Proverbs 15:31-33:
 - **"Whoever listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise. Those who ignore discipline despise themselves, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding. The fear of the Lord teaches a person wisdom, and humility comes before honour."**
- "Be a good listener" was a common saying in the ancient world. A 'proverb' making the rounds during the time of Solomon was, Q: "When hearing is good, speaking is good" - Kidner.
- ILL - Correction can be "life-giving" ...
 - Unfortunately for many it's nearly impossible to hear any personal rebuke as "life-giving."
 - Most hate correction for it feels like a 'cut-down' to our core.
 - Perhaps because of an abusive parent or an authoritarian teacher, all you hear is that 'never-good-enough' tape that rolls over & over & over again in your mind from childhood.
 - So when even correction is given - even if it's well-intentioned, it feels like death, not life.
 - And you fight it ... 'tooth n' nail.'
- We walk perilously; not ever hearing we're wrong seems better than the pain of being corrected.
- If only we would listen ...
- ILL - Looking back I'm grateful for a college soccer coach who called me out when I was 19.
 - Often when I made a mistake on the field, it would take too much time for me to recover.
 - I'd be having a 'hissy-fit' or making self-deprecating comments under my breath or yelling at a teammate behind the play.
 - As a result, I'd be 'switched off' for the next play too and make further mistakes.
 - This had been going on for 10 years - everyone saw it - but Coach Aderholdt was the first to confront me. He said something direct like this to me ... in his great Georgian accent:
 - Q: "Sattler, what the fat you doin'?! Stop being so hard on yourself. You're bringing the team down. Forget that mistake. Get ready for the next play. You can do it."
 - That time I listened and I've been a different player ever since.
- Correction heeded can change one's life.
- There's a certain humility God loves to see in our heart that serves as a catalyst for His work.
- It involves renouncing personal self-sufficiency and surrendering pride, "we need God."
- This enables us to listen.
- Vital to be asking the Lord for is this humility of spirit to receive and follow correction.

- **<Slide>** I invite the team to come and servers up front now as we move to **the Lord's Supper**.
- Somewhat surprisingly we also see this humility beautifully modelled in the life & death of our Saviour, Jesus Christ:
 - Suffering Servant: "The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back. I offered my back to those who beat me." - cf. Isaiah 50:5-6a.
 - "Although he was a son (the Son of God), he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." - cf. Hebrews 5:8-9.
 - "He humbled himself & became obedient to death -- even death on a cross." - cf. Philippians 2:8.
- And it's this humble obedience of Jesus to listen to the voice of His Father that brought Him to the cross ... and through the cross to bring life to each of us! What a Saviour! Amen.