

THE BON AIR PULPIT

May 16, 1999

Scripture: *Proverbs 1:1-3*

Sermon: **Learning How to Control Ourselves**

This Sunday we are letting God speak to us through the Book of Proverbs. I would like for you to take your Bible and turn to the first part of that book again. In it, it tells you that the book is written for two reasons. One we have already looked at and one we will look at this morning. In Proverbs 1:2, it says “for this is written that for obtaining wisdom and discipline, for understanding words of insight, for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, for doing what is right and just and fair.” In verse 7: “Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and discipline.” Wisdom has to do with where you are going. Discipline has to do with how you can get there. You may know where to go, but you may not have the strength to get there.

I remember years ago, a civil rights leader who was speaking to some young men. He said, “It does not make any difference to you how many doors are opened if you are too drunk to walk through them.” Many individuals talk to me about the doors that are opening unto them. They seek doors to try and determine God’s will for their life. I always respond to them that it does not matter how many doors are open if you are not the kind of person who can walk through them. All of us understand that we live in a society that glorifies being undisciplined. We put on our little bumper stickers “if it feels good, do it.” We seem to have enough money in our country to be able to go and do things that other people do not have the privilege of doing. We have transportation. We have money. We have the kind of freedom to be able to go and do whatever we want. As a result, we have so many tragedies in America of people who are living undisciplined lives.

One out of every 15 Americans is undisciplined in what they drink. If you look at this

congregation and use it as an example, that’s one out of 15. Just look around, realize that one out of 15 people in this group is undisciplined in how they drink. So much so that they are either in a hospital, under care, or creating problems in their work and their job. They can’t handle the alcohol. So we have Alcoholics Anonymous. We have Abuse Anonymous which adds 1 in 50 people. You have some other kinds of abuse. You add Gamblers Anonymous. You add Overeaters Anonymous. We have more “anonymous” than any group of people in the whole world. All of this is due to the fact that somehow or other we have never learned how to discipline ourselves. Discipline means that all of your life is under your control. You don’t have one part of your life determining everything else in your life. For example, if you have undisciplined knees, you may be well everywhere else but that one thing can dominate the rest of your life.

The Bible says that what it is trying to accomplish in us is to have us where we can be in charge of all of our life. Now discipline not only means being in charge, discipline is construction, that is, how can I take what I have and develop it to its fullest? When my children used to sit down and play the piano, they learned discipline and they were learning music. They were adding to their life. Inside all of us there are great gifts that God has given. God wants us to practice and discipline ourselves so we can become all that He wants us to be.

Now let’s notice what the Proverbs say about this important area of your life, discipline. First of all, it says discipline is absolutely essential to your life. The Book of Proverbs 13:18 says “he who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame.” **In Proverbs 11:12 it says if at the end of your life I groan and I say how I hated disciplines.** Proverbs 23:23 says “in all of your getting, get discipline.” Proverbs 1:7 says “fools despise discipline.” Suppose I came to you today and said “I am not a preacher, I am an M.D. and I want to tell you your child has a great disease. If you don’t do something about that disease, it’s going to destroy the life of your child.” Every parent would raise their hands and say, “well, doctor, please tell me what I have to do. Nothing is too important. No cost is too great. We are going to do something for my child. What is it?” I look you in the eye and say what the disease is. You listen to what I am saying. As a spiritual doctor, I am saying that the Bible emphasizes to you that every one of us has a

disease. If you and I do not get it under control, it will destroy our lives. Then with the same sort of interest, we raise our hand and say “preacher, tell me what it is.” Listen to what the word says. It is lack of discipline. If I do not learn discipline in my life, it will destroy me because there are sections of my life that will begin to dominate all that I am. I will get to the place where I am not in charge of me. All of us need to understand that discipline is absolutely essential in our life. You can look at every person who has ever made a contribution to life and say one thing about all of them, they were disciplined.

Jack Nicklaus, who was perhaps one of the greatest golfers who ever played, used to take 1,000 golf balls to practice one shot. Paderiski, the great Polish pianist, said, “If I do not play everyday, I notice it. If I don’t play for two days, my friends notice it. If I don’t play in a week, the critics notice it. If I don’t play in a month, the audiences know it. I must discipline my life.” I want to know that if I had to have surgery, my doctor is a man who has studied and is someone who has disciplined his hands and his skill to do the very best he can. In business, if I go for advice, I want somebody who has studied and paid the price to be able to give me the best advice. Let me tell you whom I don’t want in any of those circumstances. I don’t want some fellow who goofed off at school. I don’t want somebody who doesn’t like to read. I don’t want somebody who is not willing to pay the price to become the best he can be. If you are going to become the best you can be, there is one absolutely essential thing in your life. You are going to have to learn discipline.

Many times in our spiritual life, we don’t emphasize discipline enough. I want you to read about a man in the Bible who practiced discipline and emphasized how important it is to those of us who are Christians. This is the Apostle Paul. Listen to what he said about his own spiritual life. “Don’t you know that all the runners who run in a race run, but only one person gets the prize.” Run in such a way as to get the prize. Now if you want to get in a race and you don’t mind coming in last every time, then you are lacking inside of you the help you need to be the best you can be. I recall going to a football game one night. The cheerleaders got up and this was their cheer. “If we win, satisfied. If we lose, satisfied. Satisfied. Satisfied.” You know what? They lost. If you are absolutely content in trying to move through life and not put any

energy forward, you are going to lose. Because, all around you there are people who are disciplined and will shoot right past you. Paul said, “I want to be the best.” Everyone competing in a game goes into strict training. They do it to get an award that will not last. We need to do it to get an award that will last forever. Paul said “when I stand before God, I want to give Him the best that I can give Him. I have taken what you have given me. I give it back to you, enhanced, refined, enlarged, disciplined. Therefore, I don’t run like a man running around in circles. I don’t fight like a man beating the air.” Listen to what he said: “I beat my body. I make it my slave, so after I have shared the Gospel with others, I myself will not be disqualified from the prize.” Everywhere in the scripture, it says if you want to find God’s best for your life, you are going to have to learn discipline. You are going to have to learn the great art of discipline. This is absolutely essential in your life.

Let me take a moment and tell you a little bit about what you can begin to sense in your life if you know discipline is there. Discipline is delayed gratification. Take a child one or two years old and put a piece of chocolate cake in front of him. What are you going to have? Chocolate cake all over him. Grab, grab, grab, that’s fun. I’ve got lots of pictures of kids and grandkids with chocolate cake all over them. That’s fun for one and two year old kids, but I’ve spent a lifetime dealing with adults who have chocolate all over their face because they never have learned how to delay gratification. If it feels good, they are going to do it. Whatever is out there, they are going to reach out for it. I ask them to stop, slow down, and change their ways. They never have learned how to do that.

Discipline means not only delaying gratification. It means that I make choices before I get to the circumstances. That means that I already know what I am going to do next Sunday morning. I am going to get up and come to church. When did you make that decision? I made that decision forty years ago. One of the great Christian professors at Brown University, Dr. Wheeler, was walking across the University one day. It was raining, and he was walking with an umbrella. A student said, “Where are you going?” He said, “I am going to church.” “Professor, I don’t know

whether I want to go or not. When did you make up your mind to go to church?"

He said, "Thirty-five years ago. Some things I have already decided. I decide before I ever get there."

The Bible says that the disciplined person has some principles, some things that guide him in his life. When he comes to a situation, he doesn't have to look around and say what am I going to do, he already knows.

I have made some decisions about time. I made some decisions years ago about money. I understand that the Bible says the disciplined person is a person who brings to God the first tenth of his money. When I get paid, I don't have to sit down and say, "Well, I wonder what I am going to do with my money." I know that ten percent of it is already going to be given to God. I don't need to question that. I did question it one time when I first became a pastor of a small church. The church was so small that every time I said dearly beloved, one woman blushed and the other one thought I was proposing marriage. All of them put together their money, and they could pay me \$35.00 a week. I said to God, "I can't live on \$35.00 a week." So it was pretty easy to say I need 100% instead of 90%. I'll tell you what happened. I said, "God, I am going to be true to you if you will be true to me. So I wrote out my check for \$3.50. Because I made that decision years ago, whenever I get my check I sit down and I say this is what I am going to do for God

I don't have to discipline myself. Am I going to pray? I don't have to ask myself. Am I going to read scripture? You see, even as undisciplined as I am, the disciplined life says here are my decisions. I make them before I get there. I know that they are there. These decisions are principles with which God is governing my life. The Bible says if you don't have those principles, then the world is going to give you a hundred different things. And like Paul says, you are going to run around in big circles and end up doing nothing. Discipline is absolutely essential to life.

The second thing the Bible says is discipline is primarily to be taught in the home. Where do you learn discipline? The Bible, in the

Book of Proverbs, says that the place discipline is learned is at home. So every parent here is to model discipline to your children and to teach discipline to those in your home. More than almost anything else, you have that responsibility. Let me read to you Proverbs 19: 18. "If you do not discipline your child, you are party to their death." The reason God placed us in family units is so you could teach them love, wisdom, discipline. You tell them rules have consequences. When you break the rule, something is going to happen. Why teach that at home? Because that is the way the world is. Society says there are consequences when rules are broken. Teach them in the small ways at home so that society won't have to teach them in the big ways later.

The Bible says again in Proverbs 10:17 that if the child is not taught discipline, he will lead others astray. Let me tell you how this works. I decide to do something. We never like to do it by ourselves so we get somebody else to do it with us. So one undisciplined soul finds another undisciplined soul, and you've got two undisciplined souls doing things. The reason that people need to be taught discipline in their home is because there are so many undisciplined people around them. If they are not disciplined, somebody is going to pull them away.

Proverbs 15:32 says "He who ignores discipline dislikes himself." The reason that discipline is so important is when you don't teach discipline, you are saying I don't love you. I don't love you enough to care for you. I don't love you enough to establish the rules. I don't love you enough to say this is the way life works. I am not willing to invest my life in you. So the Book of Proverbs is very clear. It says he who does not discipline his child hates his child. If you love them, you spend time. You set boundaries. You say this is the way it works, and in the process you build up their self-esteem. They are ready to go out and meet life.

My Dad thought that when he read this in the Bible, discipline meant corporal punishment. It was spanking. He had four boys, so he practiced it quite often. When we were small, he would say "go out and get a switch. I am going to switch your legs." When we were a little older, Dad would just use whatever was available. My Mom was the same way. When I raised our children, I don't remember spanking my children that much. I did spank them on occasion, and I tried

always to emphasize to them that it was done because I loved them.

Let me say a couple of words to those of you who still have young children at home and why this is important in your life. Discipline needs always to be consistent. What drives kids crazy is when parents are not consistent. They do one thing one time, and you react one way. Then they do the same thing again, and then you react entirely different. If you are going to teach children discipline, you have got to be disciplined yourself. You have to be consistent. You have to be fair. If your kid goes out and somebody else hits him while he is driving, that is entirely different than if your kid goes out, gets two beers, and runs into somebody else. You have to react differently in those two circumstances. You have to be fair. Discipline has to be limited. I always remember the young teenager who said to me "I have been in prison for 16 years. Every time I do something, my dad says you are always doing something wrong." The teen said, "If you did something and you went to jail, you could get out after 5 years. But my dad keeps reminding me of all the things that I have ever done wrong." Discipline is not only patting them on the back end, it is also patting them on the back and saying you did a great job. Discipline has to be learned.

The third thing the Book of Proverbs tells us is God disciplines His children. God has committed Himself to discipline each one of us who is here. What I find so amazing is that sometimes adults look and say "oh, those are undisciplined kids." They never think about their discipline to their Heavenly Father. They think nothing about knowing His clear demands and say to Him, "I don't care what You say. I am going to do what I want to do." Let me remind you. The Bible says that who the Lord loves, He disciplines. God loves you too much to leave you alone. He loves you too much to just let you do whatever you want to do. God will discipline you in your life.

Two little boys were fighting one day. As they were fighting, a man came up and he pulled them apart, took one boy over to the side and disciplined him with corporal punishment. Another man standing there said, "Well, the other boy was fighting, too. Why didn't you whip him?" He said, "because he is not my son."

The Bible says if you do whatever you want to do and think you can get it by God, this is a pretty good indication you are not one of God's children. God is committed to develop you and to help you become all

that you are going to be. When I am disobedient to Him, I can rest assured God is going to move in my life. I haven't read it this way in a long time but Psalms 23 says this: "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." Let me tell you what the staff is. The staff is a stick that has a hook on it. When a sheep would go astray, the shepherd would reach over and pull him back. The shepherd would say, "hey, you are going too far. Come on back." If you want to become what God wants you to be, then you ought to say you are comforted by the staff. Because when I wander, God is going to be there to pull me back. I wish that is all the verse said, but it isn't. It says, "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." You know what a rod is? It is a club. So the shepherd would use the staff and pull the sheep back, and say, "Come on, you are going astray." If he didn't learn with the staff, the shepherd taught him with the rod. And the Bible says this is comfort to me. Let me tell you why it is comforting. People, like sheep, can't see. Do you know why sheep keep wandering away and why a shepherd has to stay out with them?. You don't put shepherds out with cows. But you put shepherds out with sheep, and you know why? Sheep can't see very well. So they just keep their head down, and they nibble, but they always look at the rear-end of another sheep. I call them rear-enders. They always look at the sheep in front of them. If another sheep in front of them is eating, and goes off a cliff, you know what the other sheep is going to do? He is going off with him! He is going to follow the rear-end of the sheep in front of him. So it is comforting to me to know that God has a staff. But when I don't pay attention, he uses the rod, and I find comfort in that. God is committed to my discipline to help me become all that I need to be. You live in world just like a sheep. If you are watching the rear end of a person who is sitting in front of you, you are going off a cliff. You need God there to help you and to pull you back.

Let me tell you how God says you can find discipline. God did not give you a spirit of timidity, but a power, a love, and self-discipline. If you are one of His children, God has placed inside of you the ability to discipline yourself. If you feel like you are out of control, then you need to come back to Him who has given you that strength and

say, "Lord, I am out of control. This is not right in my life. I want to claim to you the discipline that you have given me in Jesus Christ. I will receive whatever outward discipline is necessary. If it takes a staff, if it takes a rod, God, more than anything in my life, I want to be pleasing to you." In your own life, you need to turn to him and say, "Lord, I am not in charge. I give my life back to you." Some of you today are out of control. Maybe 90% of your life is in good shape, but 10% is not, and that 10% is governing the other 90%. You need to come to the Father who can give you the power and strength inside of you that enables you to overcome all of the forces that are trying to make you undisciplined. Some of you today need to give your heart and your life to Christ.