

Proverbs: The Core Curriculum

In a book called *The Closing of the American Mind*, Alan Bloom points out the remarkable fact that today's educational institutions, especially colleges, are very committed to one great proposition: *there is no such thing as truth*. In other words, they are very *committed* to the idea that they're not *committed* to anything. If one of our young people was to walk into a provost's or administrator's office at the local university and ask the question, "What kind of people is this institution trying to produce?" the answers you'd get in response would probably be something like this: "At this institution we really aren't trying to produce *anything* in people because in principle we do not believe there is even a target to shoot at." I read recently about a remarkable contrast between speakers at a Yale University convocation. One speaker stood up and spoke about the *meaning* of a Yale education – and he spoke of character formation, knowledge acquisition, kindness and service to your neighbor, and the application of wisdom to work and society. Then another speaker stood up and in his speech said, "Actually, a Yale education means *whatever you want it to mean*."

I hope you all notice that it is *impossible* to have *no commitments* in your discipleship goals. Poorly thought out goals or having no clear direction at all **are goals themselves**.

Does God give us goals for discipleship? Yes: 3 John 1:4 "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." In 3 John, John is not speaking of his own physical children, but of his disciples in the church. What is the goal of all our discipleship of our families and of others? That all the people we disciple would "walk in truth." In other words, they would know the truth, believe the truth, and live according to the truth. God's goals for discipleship are:

1) Faith in Jesus Christ, 2) Character, & 3) Wisdom in Living according to God's Law. No institution that I'm aware of other than the church (in its elder and deacon qualification lists – 1 Tim 3:1ff, Titus 1:7ff) has a standardized test for measuring God's goals of discipleship. We might ask, "what did so-and-so get on their SAT or ACT?" Maybe we should come up with a standardized test called the WITT – Walk In Truth Test. If I was an employer, **that** would be the score I'd be most interested in. In fact, were I an employer, I would certainly be excited to see high test scores and a high GPA, but what I'd really want to do before I hired the person is *wash a car with them*. And see if that sun-baked, 2-month old bird dropping is still there when they are done. That will teach you more about how that individual meets God's goals of discipleship than their scores. Another issue I wish people took tests on and got grades for is: *Do they tell the truth?* In discipleship, especially with your children (or children you have influence over), this is a vital character issue that we must always be aware of.

The Book of Proverbs (the core curriculum): A study of the book of proverbs yields 9 major themes which could all come under the same three things listed above in bold.

- 1. The Principle of the Tongue and the Truth**
- 2. The Principle of Hard Work**
- 3. The Principle of Self-Control and Avoiding Temptation**
- 4. The Principle of Conflict Resolution and Getting Along with Others**
- 5. The Principle of Receiving Reproof and Respecting Authority**
- 6. The Principle of Trusting God**
- 7. The Principle of Humility**
- 8. The Principle of the Virtuous Spouse**

Illustration: The ideal Christian School - *would have courses on these topics*.

Dr. Thomas Stanley's study of successful businessmen in America. This guy studied 733

millionaires in order to find out what factors led to their success. He wrote a book called *The Millionaire Next Door*. He collated the responses and found among these 733 successful businessmen that these were the top five factors *in order*:

1. Telling the Truth
2. Self-discipline
3. Getting Along with People
4. Having a Supportive spouse
5. Hard Work

What book of the Bible do these things remind you of? Is it not fascinating that higher education does not appear on this list?

Proverbs 1 - A Passionate Plea to Fear the Lord and acquire knowledge and wisdom.

⇒ V1-7: The Grand Starting Point of *all study of any topic* - *The Fear of YHWH*:

[1] The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; [2] To know wisdom and instruction, To perceive the words of understanding, [3] To receive the instruction of wisdom, Justice, judgment, and equity; [4] To give prudence to the simple, To the young man knowledge and discretion--[5] A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, [6] To understand a proverb and an enigma, The words of the wise and their riddles. [7] The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.

⇒ V8-14: Do not listen to or heed the counsel of the ungodly (See Psalm 1):

[8] My son, hear the instruction of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother; [9] For they will be a graceful ornament on your head, And chains about your neck. [10] My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent. [11] If they say, "Come with us, Let us lie in wait to shed blood; Let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause; [12] Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, And whole, like those who go down to the Pit; [13] We shall find all kinds of precious possessions, We shall fill our houses with spoil; [14] Cast in your lot among us, Let us all have one purse"--

⇒ V15-19: The reckless foolishness of wickedness

[15] My son, do not walk in the way with them, Keep your foot from their path; [16] For their feet run to evil, And they make haste to shed blood. [17] Surely, in vain the net is spread In the sight of any bird; [18] But they lie in wait for their own blood [They purposed to wait for their neighbor's blood], They lurk secretly for their own lives. [19] **So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; It takes away the life of its owners.** [Their success will be short-lived... they will destroy themselves]

- **Application:** Know for sure that all who engage in such wickedness and shun wisdom *are sowing the seeds of their own destruction - any joy or happiness or pleasure they acquire will soon be gone.*

⇒ V20-33: The Consequences of Wisdom and of Foolishness

[20] Wisdom calls aloud outside; She raises her voice in the open squares. [21] She cries out in the chief concourses, At the openings of the gates in the city She speaks her words: [22] "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorners delight in

their scorning, And fools hate knowledge. [23] Turn at my rebuke; Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.

- We must issue these very warnings to the people we disciple - people must “turn” at the rebukes of Scripture.
- Our Confession of Faith - Chapter 14 (of Saving Faith), section 2:

By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein;(1) and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands,(2) trembling at the threatenings,(3) and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come.

- Trembling at the threatenings is a mark of saving faith.

Isaiah 66:1-2 Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? [2] For all those things My hand has made, And all those things exist," Says the Lord. "But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word."

[24] Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, [25] Because you disdained all my counsel, And would have none of my rebuke, [26] I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, [27] When your terror comes like a storm, And your destruction comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. [28] "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. [29] Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the Lord, [30] They would have none of my counsel And despised my every rebuke. [31] Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, And be filled to the full with their own fancies. [32] For the turning away of the simple will slay them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them; [33] But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, And will be secure, without fear of evil."

Application: This is similar to Moses' final plea to the Israelites in Deuteronomy where he says to them: **Deut. 30:19-20** "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;"

A Few Key Passages to use as descriptions of what you're trying to produce in others in discipleship:

Proverbs 3:21-26

- **V21-22 – Sound wisdom and discretion** – If foolishness is what we have in our hearts by nature, we must be conscious about keeping sound wisdom and discretion before our eyes, other's eyes, and our family's eyes.

Question: As disciplers of others, how can we help others keep sound wisdom and discretion before their eyes?

- **V23** – If we gain a heart of wisdom and learn to love wisdom, we will walk safely and not stumble. This doesn't mean others will never trip us, but we won't trip ourselves. There is a vast difference between being shot in the foot by someone else and *shooting yourself in the foot*.

This is a common theme in Scripture. Psalm 34:21 says, "Evil shall slay the wicked."

What does this mean?

- **V24** – What a marvelous benefit of learning and living the true goals of discipleship – you will sleep well and not be afraid.
 - **Illustration:** Nehemiah – he does not worry or fear... he prays. And he's never distracted.

- **V25** – We want to see God-confident courage in the people we disciple. They do not fear, nor are they shaken by the schemes of the wicked. They are sure God is with them and that God will guide their steps.

Proverbs 28:1 “The wicked flee when no one pursues, But the righteous are bold as a lion.”
Why?

Psalm 112

- **V1** – Great description of what every one of us should *desire to be* and what every one of us is trying to produce in others: our friends, family, spouses, and children. ***Fearing the Lord***, and ***Delighting greatly in His commandments***.

Question: What does it mean to “Fear the Lord?” Why is this the starting point of discipleship – in fact the starting point of knowledge and wisdom according to the book of Proverbs? In fact, in Romans 3, the final indictment against humanity in the list is: “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

- **V2** – His descendants will be mighty on the earth. Remember, part of the biblical discipleship model is to produce **producers** of other disciples. 2 Tim. 2:2 “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Especially as you look into the eyes of your children, consider the generations of people that could come from them. Now consider what v2 says about them man who fears the Lord and delights greatly in his commandments. A question that is often thrown to my children around the table after we’ve read a passage is: “Son, how would you explain this to your 8-year old son or daughter?” “Daughter, how would you teach this to your 9-year old daughter or son?” One of our great desires is to see our children and our *children’s children* walk in the truth – and thus, we must get our own children ready to be disciplers of their own children. [Illustration: Tedd Tripp’s bed-time hymn he made up and sang to his children all their lives... the first time he heard his own son singing the very same song to his first grandchild...]
- **V3** – He prospers in his work – he understands economics... We live in a greed-driven, personal entitlement saturated society. But biblical economics is really fairly simple: *don’t spend more than you earn*. We are not entitled to have everything we want. Be wise with money and *prosper*. The one who works hard and lives wisely will have plenty to lend and give to others and plenty themselves. **See Prov 27:23-27.**
- **V4-5** – He is a gracious, generous, loving person.
- **V6-8** – These 3 verses speak for themselves and are wonderful to consider and ponder and meditate on. **Question:** Why is this individual unshakable, in everlasting remembrance, not afraid of evil tidings, steadfast in his heart, and trusting in the LORD?
- **V9-10** – Notice the striking contrast. What do we learn from this? The people we love and disciple will be either v9 or v10 in the end. How worthwhile is this great task of discipleship? **They will either be exalted in honor, or gnash their teeth and melt away.**