

Pursuing the Path of Wisdom

Proverbs 4

Proverbs 4:1-4 – *“Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding, for I give you good doctrine. Do not forsake my law. When I was my father’s son, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, he taught me, and said to me: “Let your heart retain my words. Keep my commands, and live.”*”

Background Notes

In Proverbs 4 we have more instruction about the important topic of wisdom, with teaching about the **pursuit** of wisdom and the **path** of wisdom.

In verses 1-2 Solomon addresses not just one of his sons (we’ve seen “my son” in previous chapters), but here he addresses “my sons,” or “my children.” He tells them to listen up to his sound teaching and instruction - not just for the moment, but also for life.

Solomon looks back to the time when he was a young boy, and King David, Solomon’s father, instructed him (v3-4). Solomon must have been quite young at the time as he mentions “the only son of my mother” (v3). 1 Chronicles 3 tells us that David and Bathsheba later had three more sons. In any case, Solomon wanted to pass on to his sons what he learned about wisdom when he was just a young boy. He wanted to pass on wisdom’s values for life.

When God told Solomon he could ask for anything he wanted and it would be granted him, why do you think he chose wisdom? No doubt his father David’s early instruction to acquire wisdom was an important factor.

We read about Solomon’s wise choice in 1 Kings 3: *“At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, ‘Ask! What shall I give you?’ And Solomon said: ‘You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You. You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne. Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore, give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?’*”

The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him: ‘Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your

enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, I have done according to your words. I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David did, I will lengthen your days” (1 Kings 3:5-14).

Doctrinal Points

1. The pursuit of wisdom must be chosen.

Proverbs 4:5-9 - *“Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you. Love her, and she will keep you. Wisdom is the principal thing, so get wisdom, and in all your getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she will promote you. She will bring you honor, when you embrace her. She will place on your head a graceful ornament; a crown of glory she will deliver to you.”*

Wisdom provides some great benefits – preservation, protection, a life that counts, and a life that has purpose.

- Wisdom provides the benefit of watch-care and protection. *“Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you. Love her, and she will keep you” (v6).*

- Wisdom provides the benefit of honor. *“Exalt her, and she will promote you. She will bring you honor, when you embrace her” (v8).*

- Wisdom provides the benefit of a life that counts and has purpose. *“She will place on your head a graceful ornament; a crown of glory she will deliver to you” (v9).*

But getting wisdom is not automatic. We must choose to pursue and acquire wisdom. Wisdom does not choose to pursue us; **we must choose to pursue wisdom**. The pursuit of wisdom and acquiring wisdom is supremely important. With wisdom, we will gain understanding. Perception and discernment are so important for living life well, and pleasing God. *“Wisdom is the principal thin, so get wisdom, and in all your getting, get understanding” (v7).*

Acquiring wisdom is more important than health. Acquiring wisdom is more important than wealth. Acquiring wisdom is more important than power. Acquiring wisdom is more important than popularity. It is supremely important that we pursue wisdom - but **we must choose** to do so.

Notice - we are not talking here about this world’s wisdom! Rather, we are talking about the wisdom that is from above: God’s wisdom. And it’s obvious: if you love the Word of God, and love studying the Word of God, and desire with all your

heart to know and obey the Word of God, then you have made the right choice for pursuing wisdom! The pursuit of wisdom must be chosen.

2. The path of wisdom must be followed.

Proverbs 4:10-19 - *"Hear, my son, and receive my sayings, and the years of your life will be many. I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths.*

When you walk, your steps will not be hindered, and when you run, you will not stumble.

Take firm hold of instruction. Do not let go. Keep her, for she is your life.

Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it! Do not travel on it. Turn away from it and pass on. They do not sleep unless they have done evil, and their sleep is taken away unless they make someone fall.

They eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence.

But the path of the just is like the shining sun that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is like darkness. They do not know what makes them stumble."

Here we see the contrast between two paths: the path of wisdom (v10-13) and the path of the wicked (v14-17). If you follow the path of wisdom, you will experience a stress-free life - and less stress is a principle for longer life (v10). If you follow the path of wisdom, you will confront fewer obstacles and fewer dead ends in life (v12). If you follow the path of wisdom, you will receive increasing light and guidance for living your life as God intended you to live it (v18).

You must follow the path of wisdom at all cost! Guard this path as you guard your life, and don't ever take a step on the path of wickedness (v13-15). Don't even check it out! Look the other way! Addiction to alcohol, drugs, or pornography always starts with small steps in the wrong direction. Evil activities are such a way of life for wicked people that they can't sleep at night without thinking about new ways to do the wrong thing! Their life pattern is destructive (v16-17).

Those who are righteous walk in the light. They can see where they're going. In contrast, the wicked grope in darkness with no guidance (v19). Do you want to walk in the light, with guidance from God, and know with confidence where you're going? The path of wisdom must be followed.

Practical Application

Ask yourself, "What would Jesus do?"

Proverbs 4: 20-27 - *“My son, give attention to my words. Incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes. Keep them in the midst of your heart, for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh.*

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.

Put away from you a deceitful mouth. Put perverse lips far from you. Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left. Remove your foot from evil.”

I like the New Living Bible's version of verses 23-27: *“Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life. Avoid all perverse talk. Stay away from corrupt speech. Look straight ahead and fix your eyes on what lies before you. Mark out a straight path for your feet. Stay on the safe path. Don't get sidetracked. Keep your feet from following evil.”*

And the associated note from the Life Application Bible is helpful: “Our affections, our feelings of love and desire dictate to a great extent how we live, because we always find time to do what we enjoy. Solomon tells us to guard our affections, making sure we concentrate on those desires that will keep us on the right path. Make sure your affections are pushing you in the right direction. Put boundaries on your desires. Don't go after everything you see. Look straight ahead, and keep your eyes fixed on your goal.”

This last section of Proverbs 4 is like an everyday checklist of things to avoid – how to make sure you're staying on the path of wisdom and making that path a top priority in life. All the items on the checklist involve diligently making the right decisions as a way of life. This will lead to a wholesome life that is pleasing to God (v20-23).

“What would Jesus do?” is a good question to ask ourselves when we're trying to make the right decisions in everyday life. **“What would Jesus say?”** in the conversations I have every day (v24)? Am I like Jesus in how I speak, and the things I say to others? If He checked out Netflix or surfed the internet with me, **“What would Jesus decide to watch?”** (v25)? Am I like Jesus in my movie and website choices? **“Where would Jesus go?”** if He lived in my town (v26-27)? Would He go to the same places I visit? Answering these questions honestly may be very convicting!

Making Christ-like decisions every day is not easy. In fact, making Christ-like decisions may be **painful** – and it may even involve **sacrifice**. But making the right decisions is so important. And so worth it!

Remember to ask yourself, **“What would Jesus do?”**