

## **Proverbs 4 – Two Paths, One Choice**

God's wisdom is a gift given to us, but we must make the choice to receive it. Using the metaphor of two paths, Proverbs 4 makes that choice. Imagine standing at the start of the trail, knowing that one path will lead to certain injury and disappointment, while the other will lead you safely to the most grand and glorious view. That choice would be easy to make right?

The same principle holds true in our walk with the Lord. There's a path of righteousness that shines brightly and a path of the wicked that is filled with gloomy darkness. The path of the righteous is the journey of wisdom, and the path of the wicked is the journey of foolishness. The path of the righteous is lived inside God's boundaries, and the path of wicked is lived outside of those boundaries. It seems simple if you carefully consider which path to take, you will choose the wise way. Still there are many deep-thinking people in the world who are on the wrong path. They believe that every path can be a good and right way. They choose a direction that suits their preferences and, in doing so, believe they can find their own truth and walk in it.

The reality, though, is that there is only one truth, and that is what we must carefully consider. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way *"Makes straight paths for your feet."* Hebrews 12:13. The straight path is the path God gives us in His Word, the one Jesus paved for us, and the one upon which His spirit leads us. It is the path of healing for whatever stumbling we have previously done and the path of wisdom, certainty, and righteousness for all future steps we take.

### Have A Relationship with Wisdom (1-9)

We tend to compartmentalize spirituality and push it to the margin of our lives. We divide our lives into spiritual activities, Sundays and maybe Wednesdays, and secular activities. We think that God really cares about us having a good devotional time but He is not necessarily concerned about our jobs or our schools,

outside of us trying to be a good witness in those places. We think God is really concerned that we be a witness but he is not as concerned that we show up on time or that we complete my assignments by their due date.

The study of Proverbs really blows apart that paradigm. The nitty gritty details of our daily life are not morally neutral and that's the whole point of Proverbs. Remember wisdom is a person that you know and a path that you then walk. If you lack wisdom in a practical area of your life it is not just that you are a fool in that area, although you are; you're demonstrating that you have a problem with Jesus. If you walk in foolishness, then you're walking away from Jesus. If you have a temper problem, you love to argue with people, you go too far with your friends, or you cannot see the task your boss assigns you through to completion, those are not just minor character flaws.

*<sup>1</sup>Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. <sup>2</sup>I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching. <sup>3</sup>For I too was a son to my father, still tender, and cherished by my mother. <sup>4</sup>Then he taught me, and he said to me, "Take hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands, and you will live. <sup>5</sup>Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or turn away from them. <sup>6</sup>Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. <sup>7</sup>The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. <sup>8</sup>Cherish her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. <sup>9</sup>She will give you a garland to grace your head and present you with a glorious crown."*

In verses 1-9, the father again appeals to his son to listen to his instruction in order to gain understanding which is also wisdom. He says, *"listen to me because I have good instruction. Don't abandon it."* Not only is the wisdom parental, but it's multi-generational. This was passed down from the father and the mother. Instruction and wisdom could be a multi-generational thing. We can pass down patterns of foolishness like laziness, addiction, abuse, or passivity. Or we can pass down patterns of wisdom like humility, a good work ethic, and responsibility. Proverbs 3:33 teaches us that *we can bring blessing or cursing on our house*. The good news is that the chain of wickedness can be

broken with one generation that pursues the Lord but the bad news is that a chain of faithfulness can also be broken in one generation as well.

The scripture tells us in Jeremiah 31:33 that the *law must be written on our hearts*. Practical wisdom prolongs life because it avoids the risky behaviors that brings premature death like addictions, disregarding laws, or disregarding parents by running into traffic. So David told Solomon to get wisdom and not to forsake her.

So the first step to wisdom is making a decision to commit to wisdom. The multi-generational task is to introduce our children to Jesus first, then introduce our grandchildren to Jesus.

Grow Progressively in Wisdom (v 10-19)

The way of wisdom is the ethical course to take because it is the straight path. Once on the path to wisdom, one must stay on the path. Solomon says keep hold of wisdom and she will be your life.

*<sup>10</sup> Listen, my son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many. <sup>11</sup> I instruct you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. <sup>12</sup> When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble. <sup>13</sup> Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life. <sup>14</sup> Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evildoers. <sup>15</sup> Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way. <sup>16</sup> For they cannot rest until they do evil; they are robbed of sleep till they make someone stumble. <sup>17</sup> They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. <sup>18</sup> The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. <sup>19</sup> But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.*

There are two roads away: (1) the wise, righteous path that leads to life; and (2) the foolish, wicked path that leads to death. Wisdom is a progressive thing. It's not something you arrive at. It is very similar to the New Testament idea of sanctification, where we "walk" in the spirit. Galatian 5:16-17, 25 *<sup>16</sup> So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.* You start down the path of wisdom through Jesus because after all He is the way. John 14:6.

The path that you walk progressively reveals whom you are embracing. Your daily life decisions reveal whether you are following Jesus or walking away from him. The fact that you cannot control your temper with your children, constantly want to argue with your coworkers, go in and out of dating relationships, spout off at your parents, strangers or neighbors, or cannot follow through on commitments has everything to do with Jesus.

Walking the path of wisdom is a lifestyle. It allows you to avoid those things that cause you to stumble. Fools do not always see the connection between their foolishness and the consequences.

There will always be things that seem like the right course in life but they are not. It will seem like withholding discipline from your child is being loving, but it is not. It will seem like hoarding your possessions will give you financial security, but it won't. It will seem like holding your tongue instead of rebuking a friend who is going down the wrong path is the easier and the better thing to do at the time because after all we aren't supposed to judge. But that isn't wise or loving.

Just like the sun is seen at dawn and then gets brighter and brighter until it reaches its zenith, so those who walk on the path of wisdom will see more and more of the path and walk in greater and greater wisdom until the day they are made truly wise in the presence of Jesus. Without wisdom you cannot see the way things really are so you keep ruining your life and falling into misery. Wisdom is a lamp; *Jesus is the light of the world.* John 8:12. So you can see the right path to take. But if you do not have the light, you cannot see where to walk. You stumble.

Jesus is wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification for us. 1 Corinthians 1:30 - *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.* John 14:6. Wisdom is found in Jesus and walking in him. You can have an amazing quiet time; but if you cannot control your tongue, you've got a problem with Jesus. You can raise your hands high during praise songs; but if you cannot listen to someone with a different viewpoint, you've got a problem with Jesus. You can teach or attend a Bible Study Class three times a week but if you cannot take out the trash when your wife asks, you've got a problem with Jesus. Jesus is concerned with every area of your life. If you have areas of foolishness in your life, you are walking away from Jesus.

## A Change of Heart

Many people think of God like they think of Santa Claus. He judges you if you're naughty, and He rewards you if you're nice. We believe heaven is for good people and hell is for bad people. So be a good person and go to heaven not hell. The problem with that thinking is it is not biblical. We are sinful beings and the scripture says that *none are righteous, not even one*. Romans 3:10

Has there ever been a simple or foolish behavior in your life that you could not stop? You know what's wrong, destructive, sinful, and unwelcome but you just can't stop. It is a continuous struggle. You may even put guards in place that help us for a little while but eventually the guards are not enough. We think that behavior modification is the answer. Behavior modification treats the surface issue, but it does not dig down to the source. The problem is in our hearts - that is the source. So for example, if you have a problem with addiction to alcohol, food, shopping etc., your primary problem is a lack of self-control. You may modify the activity, but if you don't address the root issue then the problem will come back.

*<sup>20</sup> My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. <sup>21</sup> Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; <sup>22</sup> for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body. <sup>23</sup> Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. <sup>24</sup> Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. <sup>25</sup> Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. <sup>26</sup> Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. <sup>27</sup> Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.*

## Messages Affect Your Heart (v 20-22)

Wisdom is a person to love and a path to walk. Wisdom is a process of receiving the right words and listening to the right voice. Whose voice and what message do you listen to? For Solomon, there are messages coming from the mouths of God, his father, counselors, peers, the forbidden women, and others. They are all competing for Solomon's attention. They all want his heart. The same is true for us. But which ones you listen to is of vital importance because messages go in your ear and down into your heart. Your ears and eyes are the gates to your heart.

This means that you must know wisdom, memorize wisdom, meditate on it and live it. Meditate and identify what idols or values in your heart are keeping you safe from walking in wisdom. The law - wisdom- must be written on the heart. Wisdom must enter your heart to keep you from evil. Proverbs 3:3 - *Tie them around your neck as a reminder. Write them deep within your heart.* and 7:3 says the wise teaching must be *written on the "tablet of your heart."*

#### Your Heart is the Command Center for Your Life (v 23)

The heart is the key and source of everything in your life. The heart is the source of the river of your life; it is the command center. Everything you do flows from your heart. The way you think, talk, and act flows from your heart. The heart is the agent governing all of your body's actions. If your heart is broken and sinful, it will lead you astray. Proverbs 22:15 - *A youngster's heart is filled with foolishness, but physical discipline will drive it far away* - 20:9 - *Who can say, "I have cleansed my heart; I am pure and free from sin"? 28:26 - Those who trust their own insight are foolish, but anyone who walks in wisdom is safe.*

Scripture tells us that lust, perversion, deceit, anxiety, backsliding, pride, jealousy, and wrong speech reside first in the heart. Mark 7:20-23 - <sup>20</sup>*He went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. <sup>21</sup>For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup>adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. <sup>23</sup>All these evils come from inside and defile a person."*

If all we do is modify behavior but leave the source of the issue untouched in our hearts, it will spring up and breakout elsewhere. Your behavior reveals the state of your heart. Outward gossip can reveal jealousy, bitterness, or pride in the heart. Adultery or pornography reveals lust in the heart. We need to assess what is happening in our hearts.

We need new hearts for real and lasting change. We fail to obey because we lack the hearts to obey. The Lord promises a new heart. *Deuteronomy 30:6- The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.*

So we need to be born again with a new heart - a new source of power we did not have before. This happens through belief in Jesus. Once you trust Christ for salvation, you are born again and given new appetites for God, His Word, His church. You are not given perfection yet - but you are changed.

#### Your Behavior Reveals the Condition of Your Heart (v 24-27)

Proverbs 4 says that your actions reveal what is in our hearts. Solomon tells his son to put away devious speech. This a command for good behavior but the son will only be able to obey it if he has guarded his heart. Guard that heart - to keep your tongue. Evil speech reflects an evil heart. If you use your speech to hurt others, deceive others, gossip about others, or falsely flatter others, then it is the overflow of a sinful heart.

Change must take place at the heart level. That, not behavior modification, is the message of Christianity. You need to be born again by Jesus, and then the Spirit of Jesus will empower you to work on your heart issues. Jesus says only the pure in heart will see God. Jesus will grant His Spirit and a new heart to all who believe in Him. He will account you righteous before God, and then He will begin the work of progressively growing you in righteousness by the power of His Spirit through the Word. So it is OK not to be OK but it is not OK to stay that way.