

Part 7: One Path, Many Witnesses

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We've been working through the book of Proverbs here at Sovereign Hope and Proverbs is a book about wisdom. Now if you've been with us, you know that how we define wisdom is also important. Each of us has an idea of wisdom, but this book encourages us to not rely on our own understanding but instead to let God define wisdom for us.

Wisdom in the book of Proverbs is learning to read the world through God's eyes not our own. Much like the fear of the Lord which is a reverent reliance upon God, wisdom humbly chooses to see and act according to God's understanding of reality not our own.

The necessary lens to see the world this way is through Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 1 shows us that Jesus is the "wisdom of God." That's because in Jesus things which seem delightful are shown as dangerous. The cross shows the wages of sin. But also things which seem dull, obedience and allegiance to God, are seen as delightful, new life through Jesus' work on the cross to have our sins dealt with by faith, so that we might experience relational joy and satisfaction with God himself.

The wisdom of the world leads to death, but the wisdom of God leads to life through faith and repentance in Jesus Christ. Wisdom sees God's provision and reads all of life through that lens.

Solomon is writing this book as a father to his child. But just like any child who has ever received any instruction from their parent, we often question if dad knows what's best. We understand that he is an authority, but we doubt that his authority makes him credible in this specific area.

This is illustrated in the evolution of advertising. It used to be that any commercial boasted some expert in that field discussing the benefit of the product, but now the voice of the expert has been replaced by the experience of the consumer. We care less about the appeal of authority, and we care more for the appeal of experience.

This might seem like a challenge to those who believe God's word. The Christian faith begins with an appeal to authority. There is a God and you're not it. And yet as our culture grows more experiential, our faith is not doomed. Why? Because our experience matters too. And guess what, following Jesus has brought joy and peace and satisfaction to far more people than you can ever imagine.

Not only is God's word true in that it means you must submit to it. But our experience in following God's wisdom should make us want to submit to it. That's what the father is going to do with this text today in Proverbs 4. He is going to lean hard into us as his children and leverage our obedience to God's wisdom, but first he is going to remind us of his own experience with wisdom.

The big picture we are going to see today is this: **The wise see God's wisdom in the lives of others and are encouraged to apply God's wisdom in their own lives.**

We are going to see this today in two parts. First in verses 1-19 we are going to see **The Generational Witness of the Wise**. In that passage we are going to be encouraged to look back. Then in verses 20-27, we are encouraged to look at the present. That's where we will see **The Present Decisions of the Wise**.

Let's start with our first point today: **The Generational Witness of the Wise (*Teaching of the Grandfather*)**. We are going to see this in two parts and we read the first part in **Proverbs 4:1-9**.

So we are introduced to new characters here in Proverbs 4 and those characters are grandma and grandpa. Here the dad says to us, when I was a boy, my parents took me aside and said these same things to me. So far we've read three chapters of the father's words to us as his children, but now the father slips into a bit of biography where we learn that he's not making this stuff up.

He was taught these same principles. Look again at the words the grandfather used to teach the father: **Proverbs 4:4-9**.

There's a unique force to these words that are lost on us a bit in English, but this is actually not the first time we see this theme come up. In Proverbs 3 the theme came up when the father told us to lay hold of wisdom and to hold her fast. Today it shows up in our text when grandpa says, "embrace her."

These words are actually passionate words of romance. Which makes sense knowing this book was generally used to train young men as a rite of passage. We all know the desire we have in our youth for the longing of some intimate partner. I remember one vivid experience I had at Silverwood when I was in high school. Standing in line is the worst part of amusement parks, but there ahead of me I saw a couple who were just holding each other's hands and playfully hugging each other. I don't know why that moment of all moments stands out in my mind, but I remember thinking to myself: "I want that."

And here for all of us is grandpa saying, "Come and embrace this lover. Look at God's wisdom and be smitten with her, don't let her go, don't stop thinking about her, don't risk being lonely without her!"

Here for the married the dating and the single is the partnership which we were made for. And just like only a grandfather could, we know he speaks of this from experience. Why is he calling us to long for and embrace a reliance upon God? Because he has experienced the rewards of it.

Did you see the experience baked into his words: verse 6 "do not forsake her and she will keep you, love her and she will guard you." This man knows that we should cling to God's grace but he also knows that if we cling it is not our grip which holds us but the grip of grace which holds us fast.

Verse 7, "prize her highly and she will exalt you, embrace her and she will honor you. She will adorn your head in all the comfort and validation that your heart longs for. All of the peace, all of the belonging, all of the satisfaction you want comes in the hand of this lover.

Why does grandpa say this? Because he has experienced it. He knows it.

This is the benefit of the church and the wonder of church history. The church is meant to be a place where when we begin to doubt the experience of God's grace to us in Jesus Christ, we can look across the sanctuary, or across history and see brothers and sisters in Christ who say: "It's been good for me."

Whatever the desire you might have for another embrace, I promise you that in this church are people with those same challenges who have come out on the other side to say: "Embrace wisdom, keep it, savor it, trust it, for it is so much better."

I know in this body those who have lost children, I know those who have endured abuse, those who have had the riches of the world, those who have tasted the life of sexual freedom, those who have wrestled with same-sex attraction, those who have reached the pinnacle of worldly success and here, if you would use the church that God gave you, you might be able to talk to them and hear: "God's wisdom is better."

Christianity is no Costco. You walk into a Costco and the whole of the warehouse is a void utilitarian experience. Costco's are not crafted for your comfort. They want to give you the product and get you on your way. Do you perhaps think that about God's grace for you in Jesus? That he calls you to put off sin and put on holiness only because he wants to pad the end of quarter report on salvation?

No, Christianity is a Cathedral. When you walk into it you realize that every aspect of architecture and art is meant to satisfy you with an experience of the divine. Here it is the experience of others that reminds us of that.

If you struggle to believe that this wisdom of God in Jesus Christ is good for you I encourage you to pick up a history book. Read of Augustine who spent a privileged life pursuing happiness only to find it in Jesus. Consider Eric Liddell who, as a gold medal winner, had a lavish life of sponsorships ahead of him but turned it all down to serve God as a missionary in China. Read of David Brainerd who wrestled with crushing depression and anxiety but who found such compelling purpose and belonging in God's glory that he endured the lonely work of evangelizing Native Americans in North America.

The gift of God's church is meant to portray the experience of grace to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In Jeremiah 6, God outlines for his people the joy of the good path, but look at what happens: **Jeremiah 6:16**.

The path is so good, but they don't choose it. Why? Because they don't believe God to be true. But here Solomon as our metaphorical father says, "But son, it's been good to me."

This is the second part of the generational witness, this the appeal of the Father. Read with me: **Proverbs 4:10-19. (*Experience of the Father*)**

Here the father circles back to the theme of two paths and he says: choose the path of righteousness not the path of evil. And why should we believe him? Because he says, just as my father told me, now I'm telling you.

Why is the father here and able to make this appeal to us as sons, because he has experienced the fruit of wisdom. He has reached the ripe old age in life by following wisdom and now he says, "Listen also to me."

What is his specific appeal? Stay to the path of righteousness, do not go down the path of wickedness. He knows that the experience of God's faithful saints is not the only experience you will encounter. You

will encounter the promises of the world, the allure of wealth and the satisfaction of sin. But look at how he describes what is really behind that path: **Proverbs 4:14-19**.

The path of the wicked is the path of darkness and stumbling. The path of the righteous is the path of light and security.

The path of the wicked is at no loss of advocates. But they are advocates who eat violence and consume evil. They want you to go on their path because misery loves company. Those who call you away from obedience to God and towards sin do not call you towards it because they have experienced perfect peace in it. They call you into it because their hope is that if enough people say it is satisfying, that maybe they too will be satisfied.

They can't sleep unless they are joined in their unrest. We know this heart. How many of us take a whiff of something foul in the fridge and our first reaction is to turn to our roommate and say, "Here smell this." Why do we do this? Because we feel a little bit better knowing someone has shared in our experience even if it's unpleasant.

But the father here says, dear son, there is a pleasant path, choose it. Run away from the path of evil and trust the path of obedience.

I think there is a wonderful point of application in this text that applies both generally to Christians in discipleship, but also specifically to parents in parenting. What will your child, or those whom you are discipling walk away from you and treasure?

There are two things I always talk to my son about. I want him to be a fan of the Tennessee Titans, and I want him to love Missoula, Montana. I'm always looking for little ways to encourage and teach him the implications of both of those truths. I turn small things into practical examples.

But is it quite possible that many of us will make fine hunters or conservationists out of our children, good employees, stellar students, and disciplined athletes yet miserable Christians.

Here this father pleads not for the accolades of the world with his child, but the rewards of the gospel.

Augustine was raised in an upper class home and had many privileges afforded to him. He mentioned the ways in which his father paid for and opened every door to him when it came to his education but then he went on to say this: **"For many far abler citizens did no such thing for their children. But yet this same father had no concern how I grew towards [God], or how chaste I were; [but only that] I were copious in speech however barren I was towards [God]."**

When you consider your children, when you consider the relationships you have with those in this church, does the thrust of your counsel and the scope of your encouragement lead them to value above all things their grasp of the gospel and their reward in it?

That's not to say we stop teaching them other things, but it is to say that we should examine what the sum of our emphasis is in life. Do you realize that God has placed you in the lives of others so that you might say and model: "But the path of the righteous is like the light of the dawn which shines brighter and brighter until full day?"

How might we be a church that does this? How can you begin to model this same legacy of witness? I think we can each do two things to this end. First, don't be afraid to share stories where you chose the wrong path. It is a grace for your kids and your brothers and sisters in Christ to hear your own experience with sin which shows its emptiness and it's pain.

It's a danger when a church glories in its sin, but it is a gift of God when a church uses stories of their own sin to show the surpassing worth of the gospel.

Secondly, share and show places in your life where by God's grace you are experiencing the ever increasing light of the gospel! Because all growth is God's grace, we don't need to worry about meekness when it comes to sharing stories of us growing in God's wisdom. If it's truly the work of God our witness of growth in Bible Study, putting off of sin, prayer, evangelism, or whatever doesn't show how stellar we are but instead how rewarding and wonderful God's grace is.

This is exactly what God's wisdom applied in his church is meant to do. Look with me at **Hebrews 12:1**. Why does God give us the witness of experience? So that we might take it upon ourselves to walk in it.

This is now where the father goes, and is our second point this morning: **The Present Decision of the Wise**.

Read with me, **Proverbs 4:20-27**.

After sharing the story of grandpa, after pointing to the similarity of his own message, this dad now turns to us and says: "Do this too."

In fact he builds into this passage a little literary device that stresses how important it is for us to heed what he is saying here. I texted Jonny to see if there was a similar feature as this in the music world and he introduced me to what is called: deceptive cadence.

Deceptive cadence goes like this. You hear enough verses of a song that you begin to think you know what is going to follow because you've heard the same series of notes before. But at some point the composer adds tension with a deceptive cadence. Just when you think you hear what is familiar and begin to assume what is next, he inserts a minor chord which creates a distinct emphasis in the song.

That's what Solomon is doing here. Look back the beginning of chapter four and we will see this pattern. There are two sections prior to this and each begins with a twofold admonition followed by a purpose statement. Verse 1: hear O' sons and be attentive that you may gain insight. Look ahead to verse 10: hear my son and accept my words that the years of your life may be many.

And here in verse 20 he sets us up the same way: "My son be attentive to my words, incline you ear to my sayings." There is the two fold admonition, now what we would expect is the purpose, or the reward of this. But he tricks us and he doubles back down on the admonitions: "Let them not escape from your sight, keep them within your heart."

He purposefully extends the admonitions to add a level of importance to our ability to hold fast to wisdom, why? For they are life to those who find them and healing to all their flesh."

In other words the reward of this life is so wonderful, so pervasive, so healing, so experientially satisfying that you need to make sure you do not skip the hard work of hiding these truths in your heart.

The way of wisdom might seem wonderful, but it's not easy. It takes dedication to work God's faithfulness and deliverance in Jesus into the depths of our hearts. But when it is there, when we by God's grace begin to rely on God more and more in obedience and worship, it redeems our whole flesh. All of our body is different.

To illustrate this point Solomon concludes by showing the way this effort to keep wisdom changes our body: the heart, the mouth, the eyes, and the feet.

Why is this important? Because here he is not only showing us what it looks like to keep wisdom in our hearts, but he's actually showing us what we can do to work wisdom into our hearts. If you want this experience, here are the things you should be doing.

First, ***Keep your heart. Proverbs 4:23.***

I remember watching a commercial once (I think it was for Sprite) that was meant to convince you to drink Sprite and not water. It had a guy who was up at a mountain stream showing us the source of all that pure mountain water. The camera panned and showed a bunch of bears bathing and relieving themselves in the mountain stream.

The point was if the source is contaminated up here, you know you're not getting good water down there.

This is the same point Solomon is making with the heart of the wise. We must be vigilant in keeping our heart exclusively for the things of God so that we do not contaminate the springs of life.

Everything we do, in this list, and in our lives, stems from the source of our heart. Now we can't guard our hearts enough to make them pure. But the beauty of the gospel is that our faith in Jesus Christ cleanses our hearts. He gives us new hearts. So we have the task of protecting what the work of Christ has already done by grace.

What does it look like to do this? It means that you should be keenly aware of your own affections. What delights your heart? What frustrates your heart? And do the same things delight and frustrate God? If the answers are no, then you have the wonderful privilege of going to God in your weakness and asking him to help you.

To work wisdom into our hearts we must first make efforts to guard our hearts.

Second, we ***Separate Broken Mouths.*** Read with me: ***Proverbs 4:24.***

Now this list is not ala carte. It's not that you can keep wisdom within your heart by selecting the at least three of the four which follow. If you want to keep your heart, you need to make progress in all of these. This is especially true with the mouth because the mouth speaks from the heart.

That's what Jesus himself says in Luke 6.

Here Solomon makes it clear that we need to put crooked speech and devious talk far from our mouths. This includes a whole gambit of things, coarse joking, gossip, lies, anything which doesn't help others keep to the straight path of righteousness.

Why is this so important? Many of us can justify the language or manners in which we speak, but here we see that it's really hard to separate the words of the mouth from the motives of our hearts. If you are comfortable with crooked speech, it can quickly turn to devious talk. In other words, it's not long before "idle words" turn into actionable plans.

The dirty joke might be concealing a dirty plan. The harmful words might betray hateful actions. The sarcasm might show active disgust.

We keep our heart, we guard our mouths, and now lastly, we are going to lump the last two together: ***We look where you walk.*** Read with me: **Proverbs 4:25-27.**

Here the father is calling us to look where we are going so that we might not swerve away. How many times do you see in a day while driving a sign, or hear a radio ad, warning of the danger of texting and driving. One glance down, regardless of how straight the road, proves dangerous.

Solomon makes the same case here. It's the same case that the author of Hebrews continues to make in **Hebrews 12:1-2.**

And here, more than just a warning is a promise that if you fix your eyes on Jesus, your paths will be sure. If you do the hard turning your feet away from evil and following the path of obedience, you will find the good experience of God's grace that you've always wanted.

When you consider where you are going in life, where is it? If you were to actually ponder the path of your feet, what would it say about the object of your gaze?

There's a scene in Indiana Jones where Indy has found the location of the Holy Grail. Yet between him and the Grail is a huge chasm. But there he remembers a riddle he heard earlier about an invisible path.

So what he does is he grabs some dust from the ground, throws it out into the abyss, and some dust lands on an invisible bridge that he is able to make his way across.

As I sat down to write this sermon I thought that that could be a great illustration of this path. But having spent time in this text, it is a great illustration but to the opposite point.

You see we often think that a life spent obeying Jesus, a life spent walking in God's wisdom, is life risked walking an invisible path. We don't know where it is, it's scary, and there's not a lot of confidence in it.

But here in this text as we see the witness of the grandfather and the appeal of the father we see the opposite. When we combine Proverbs 4 with Hebrews 12 we see that it is not the path of righteousness that calls us to blind hope and suspect steps but the path of sin.

You see those around us have done just enough to kick up dust, but at the end that's all it is. A small amount of dust which hopefully will illuminate a path which otherwise seems invisible.

But this is not what is offered to us in the gospel. Yes, Jesus says narrow is the road, but not invisible, not untrodden, not suspect, not unreliable. Solid is this road. Faithful is its path.

The light shines brighter upon it every day and every saint to have ever trod it stands beside it as a witness to its end: this path is the path of life. Do you want certainty? Here is the way. Do you want a sure step? Here is the path.

Christ has shown it, the church has tread it, will you experience it?