

## Proverbs / “Two Paths: A Fountain or a Drain”

Jonny Kiedrowski | Proverbs 16:16-25

May 23rd, 2021

As we begin, we're going to try something this morning. Let's take a moment and imagine that we are transported to a time before 1990. Let's say, 1985. Hair is big, The Soviet Union is still a thing, PG rated movies are somehow wildly inappropriate for kids and there's no internet.

And you have to write a research paper for your biology class on Mitochondria.

So after school you get your bike and you physically travel to the library. You ask a librarian, very quietly, where you can find the biology research section and they point you in the right direction. You are now surrounded by thousands of books with no idea where to start.

But then you remember: Dewey. The dewey decimal system, card catalogs. Of Course!  
Now you got this. You pull on these little drawers that smell like grandma's house and you start flying through yellowed index cards, making notes on locations and classifications with a pencil on a notepad.

Now, according to Dewey, there are over 500 books about cellular biology here. Ribosomes, Membranes, the Nucleus,. You don't need any of that. You're after that Mitochondria books. You discover that in the whole library, there are maybe 20 books that might help you write your paper.

Your notepad is full of numbers and it's time to go to the shelf. You stare at titles and the authors, and you look at the little numbers on the spines. You climb up a ladder. You crouch on the floor. Panic begins to set in. Panic sets in because 15 of the 20 books you wanted are checked out and you come to realize that you have picked a very popular organelle. Next time you will pick Golgi Bodies.

You take your five books and get in line to check out. The librarian stamps your card and you leave.

You know that this is only the first part of your journey. As you ride on your bike you pray that these books might actually be able to help you. Because you don't know for sure yet. Because you'll need to read them. There is no preview. There is no search. You'll just have to read them all to discover if they're helpful or not.

Can you believe that this is something we used to have to do?  
Don't get me wrong, writing a report is still difficult, but it's also so much easier.

Now, millions of books, periodicals, journals and peer reviewed articles are digitized, searchable and sections of all of them can be previewed and skimmed from the comfort of your home.

In light of what we know now, can you imagine writing a research paper without the internet?

As difficult as that situation is, I have another question,  
Can you imagine doing life without wisdom? Heartache, breakdown, selfishness, greed and violence would run amok. But we're not on our own, we don't have to walk through life hoping for the best. We don't have to worry about whether or not we're smart enough to figure things out. What a grace that God tells us what is wise and how to live.

Our passage today begins with a declaration. It begins with a shout.

**SLIDE**

V 16

16 How much better to get wisdom than gold!

How much better? We're going to find out.

Our big idea for today is this:

**SLIDE**

**God's Wise word is the most valuable possession.**

**Those who humbly trust in it find life and bring life to others.**

And in our points for today, what we're going to see is that

- 1) God's Word Reveals That There Are Only Two Paths
- 2) Trusting in God's Wise Word is the Path to Life
- 3) Trusting in Our Arrogant Heart is the Path to Death

Let's read the first part of our text today. It sets up everything else we'll talk about today

**SLIDE**

**Proverbs 16:16-19**

*16 How much better to get wisdom than gold!*

*To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.*

*17 The highway of the upright turns aside from evil;  
whoever guards his way preserves his life.*

*18 Pride goes before destruction,  
and a haughty spirit before a fall.*

*19 It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor  
than to divide the spoil with the proud.*

Proverbs is often a book of contrasts. We've come to expect it by this point.  
The book is filled with proverbial wisdom that goes something like this

"The one who does the right thing gets good,  
but the one who does the evil thing will get bad."

I'm not talking down on it for doing so though. In a very simple and powerful way, these contrasts throughout the entire book of proverbs have been preparing us for our first point today. And that is that

**SLIDE**

**1) God's Word Reveals That There are Only Two Paths**

Firstly, there is God's path as he has revealed it. The path to goodness, to flourishing, to life. Life as it was meant to be lived. This isn't a way to live, a choice among many. The scriptures call it a highway. It's paved. It is the fastest and most direct route to a good life that honors God and all the people he created in his image.

But there is another way. The non-path. It's off the highway. Off the road. In the woods. Claiming to be a short cut and it calls out to us all. This path says:

*"The turn is just up ahead and you can get to the good stuff quicker than if you stayed on the highway. All you have to do is just step over this lie or that person. They don't deserve what you deserve. You'll be fine. You'll reach the end in no time. You've seen many others fall on this path before, but not you. This didn't work out for them, but you're smarter than them, quicker than them. You'll be fine."*

These are our choices, because there are only two paths.

The wise person humbly walks on God's path, while the foolish person arrogantly makes their own path.

Now our passage today begins with a value statement.

**“Getting wisdom is better than gold!”**

At the end of the passage we encounter another value statement, much like the first.

**SLIDE**

**Proverbs 16:19**

*19 It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor  
than to divide the spoil with the proud.*

In these verses we are being warned about the connection between money and our hearts. The Bible does this often. God knows where we are weak. We can think that if we just had more money, we'd be successful, safe, or self-sufficient. That we'd have the comforts or security that we crave. That our reputation would improve and that we'd be noticed by others and affirmed for our accomplishments. We use money to buy things, but we trust in money to give us a lot more than we should.

Earlier in our series in Proverbs we heard

**SLIDE**

**Proverbs 11:28**

*Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.*

Riches don't deserve our trust, God does. The wise person listens to the warning and they follow God's Instruction even if it leads away from personal material blessings. But the foolish person rejects God's instruction and will turn to evil in pursuit of gold and all it promises.

1 Timothy 6:8-11 puts it this way

**SLIDE**

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain, 7 for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. 8 But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. 11 But as for you, O man of God, flee these things.

Our hearts will be tempted everyday to trust in our ability to amass wealth and provision instead of trusting in God. But the wise person knows that God's path ends with eternal blessings of greater value than worldly comforts. The foolish person trusts in themselves to make a path that ends in blessing but God says that their path will end in destruction.

**SLIDE**

**Proverbs 16:17-18**

*17 The highway of the upright turns aside from evil;  
whoever guards his way preserves his life.  
18 Pride goes before destruction,  
and a haughty spirit before a fall.*

God's way will always turn away from evil. This is a litmus test for how we know which path we are on. What path are you on today? This is serious question that's worth serious reflection. Have you found yourself sinning to get what you want or what you think you deserve? Is your life more defined by following your heart or by following God's word?

Pride is lurking in all of our hearts. It's what naturally comes out. Just believing that there is a God is humbling because you have to acknowledge that you're not him.

Pride puts blinders on our eyes. It shuts out others so our focus is only on ourselves and it makes people expendable. It also shuts out God's eternal plans and it focuses our attention and energy on the short term.

Whereas God's concern for us is for the whole of our life and beyond, helping us to stay on a path that leads to eternal blessings. we too often find ourselves greedy or impatient. Like the prodigal son that Jesus spoke of; we seek our inheritance now.

Carpe Diem, Yolo, Hakuna Matata

These funny sounding phrases tell us to seize the day, you only live once, have no worries. But today is not all that matters. Every path ends somewhere The upright are on a highway of life turning away from evil. The arrogant say they don't even need a path. They say they'll make their own. Hakuna Matata - No worries!

Now living where we do, we all understand that paths are important. We understand how dangerous going off the path can be. I have lived here in western Montana for just little bit shy of 7 years. In that time, I've gone hiking, hunting, fishing and huckleberry picking. I've been to Glacier and the Bob. But deep down inside my heart I am still a city boy who knows more about subways and deli's than Tamaracks and "cricks." So when I'm out in the wilderness, I stay on the path. I stay close to the logging road. I always know where it is. I don't make my own path out here.

But the prideful person making their own path, far from the highway of the upright, they'd be like a New Yorker in the middle of the Bob Marshall without a GPS or a map. What do you think is going happen to him? He's gonna get lost. He's going to fall and he's probably going to die.

Having an eternal perspective is not natural to our hearts. In our flesh We want blessings right now. We want our treasures now. Pridefully we can say "I don't care where this path I'm making leads me as long as I can pick up all of my heart's desires along the way."

This is Immediate fulfillment regardless of eventual consequences. It's dangerous and yet we all are prone towards it.

Have you ever done this? Maybe in little ways? For example, have you ever eaten something and said, "I'm gonna regret that tomorrow." That's a funny example, but is this how you treat sin in your life? "I'm gonna regret that tomorrow".

Brothers and sisters if you claim faith in Christ but you are regularly and habitually sinning, pushing off change to one day in the future you are in danger. You have underestimated sin. Sin isn't going to give you a tummy ache. It's going to kill you. You need to cut it out. If you have been waiting for a day to make a change, today is that day. If you decide that change is the future for you, that is where it will stay. Out of reach. Commit your heart to the Lord today. Confess your sins to God, he promises to cleanses you from them. In humility, bear your burdens with fellow believers and find that they will help you stay on God's highway. Don't wait for tomorrow.

When we make our own paths we're not promised anything from tomorrow besides destruction. But on God's path we are promised life. God wants us to look forward to it. He wants our hearts to be content today, no mater our circumstance, because of it.

In Matthew 6:19-21 Jesus Says

**SLIDE**

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

There are only two paths. God's path and a dangerous trail we can make for ourselves. But, how do we find God's path and how can we be sure that we are on it. That what we're going to look at in our next section.

#### **SLIDE**

### **2) Trusting In God's Wise Word is the Path to Life**

God has not left us to our own devices. We're not wandering in the woods alone. We have the GPS, the map and the compass. We have God's word.

Let's pick up in our passage at verse 20

#### **SLIDE**

#### **Proverbs 16:20-24**

*20 Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good,  
and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord.*

*21 The wise of heart is called discerning,  
and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.*

*22 Good sense is a fountain of life to him who has it,  
but the instruction of fools is folly.*

*23 The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious  
and adds persuasiveness to his lips.*

*24 Gracious words are like a honeycomb,  
sweetness to the soul and health to the body.*

This is the main portion of our text today and it does something interesting. And that's because in it we have pairs of verses that complement each other moving together from the ends to a central point in the middle. And so I think what will be helpful will be to work through the passage by considering the pairs together.

And to help us better understand the point of the text I'm going to divide it into three sections.

#### **SLIDE**

### **Trusting in God's Wise Word is the Path to Life**

A) God's Words Change Us (20,24)

B) God's Words Make Hearts Wise and Winsome (21,23)

C) The Wise Have a Fountain, Fools Have a Drain (22)

Let's start with the promise that

#### **God's Words Change Us**

And we're looking at V20 and 24

It's important to note that in V20 the Hebrew word translated as "word" here can also be translated as commandment.

#### **SLIDE**

#### **Proverbs 16:20,24**

*20 Whoever give thoughts to the word, (the commandment), will discover good.  
and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord.*

*24 Gracious words are like a honeycomb,  
sweetness to the soul and health to the body.*

God's words are good and good for us. Mediate on and give thought to God's words/God's commandment and you will discover good. Trust in the Lord and you will be blessed. Any words that comes from God are gracious words meant to heal us. His commands are the words that lead to our wisdom. It's God's word that is the highway of the upright and the path to life, contentment and healthy souls.

What an amazing gift that God would give us his word, that he would tell us what is true and right and good. What a gift that he would tell us what leads to death and what leads to life. It seems so simple and it is.

"Blessed is he who trusts in the Lord"

What does it mean to trust in the Lord? How do we, sinners, become blessed? We must start with trusting God's word. What God says about himself in it. What he says about us in it. God's word is where everything we should believe about him is revealed. Without it, we're left with ambiguous spirituality and with it we have a wondrous message of hope and redemption. To trust in the Lord, we must start with trusting his word. It's only when we trust it, that we can trust him and begin to change.

I like sushi. Maybe you do too.

If you do, have you ever taken someone out to eat sushi for the first time?

There's a moment where you're trying to explain to them that it's going to be great but they're just white-knuckling the chair as they watch small plates of raw sea creatures pile up on the table.

But **you** know that if your friend just tasted it, they would know how good it is. If they tasted it, they would trust you. They would believe you and they would change. They would love sushi too.

#### **SLIDE**

**Proverbs 16:24** says

*24 Gracious words are like a honeycomb,  
sweetness to the soul and health to the body.*

The proverbs here appeal to our sense of taste and invite us to dine on God's commandments. Gracious words that reveal the highway of the upright away from sin and death. The deeper we go into understanding God's goodness, discovering God's goodness in his word, the more we'll see our need for it.

When we believe what the scriptures say about God's righteousness and his commands, we simultaneously have to come to terms with what they say about our unrighteousness and disobedience.

The first blessing of trusting that God has revealed himself through his word is a painful one.

#### **SLIDE**

**Romans 3:20** says

*...through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

When we gain this knowledge of God's law, his commands, we know that we haven't measured up. We are not perfect as he is perfect. We have wandered far. Into deceit, and lust, greed, anger, jealousy, the list could go on and under all of it: pride. But to believe that you are a sinner is to believe that you need a savior. It's God's word that reveals our need to us, and it also reveals how our need was perfectly met in Jesus Christ.

Our passage today has encouraged us to get on the path of the upright and Jesus says in

**SLIDE**

**John 14:6**

*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

Jesus has perfectly fulfilled all of the commandments. Of course he did. He is the word! The commandments are his. He is the word of God made flesh and through faith in him we can walk the upright path; our disobedience was nailed to the cross with him and he took the fall that our arrogant pride deserved.

For those exhausted from making their own paths through the wilderness of sin understand that because of Christ's work we can rest in God. He wants us to.

Listen to the honey dripping off of his words!

**SLIDE**

**Matthew 11:28-30**

*28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

If we trust in Christ we will be blessed and we come to faith in Christ through God's word. In following Christ, our path decisively changes from death to life and this is the greatest change that God's word works in us. Our eternal destiny is forever changed in Christ and God continues to pour out blessings on us on our new path as he continually changes our hearts.

This is our second point here

**SLIDE**

**God's Words Make Hearts Wise and Winsome (21,23)**

This is what our verses say in Proverbs 16:21, 23

**SLIDE**

*21 The wise of heart is called discerning,  
and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.*

*23 The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious  
and adds persuasiveness to his lips.*

When we encounter God's wisdom, especially the wisdom of the Gospel, our hearts become wise. We know something transformative that we didn't know before. We now know God's heart toward us and the lengths that he would go to to demonstrate that love.

Once you have given thought to the word, discovered the good of Christ and put your trust in him, you also have a new found wisdom about those around you. Because of the difference Christ has made in us, from this vantage point, we have a Gospel powered clarity when it comes to what is in the hearts of others and what their hearts need. These two verse we just read make the same point: Those with hearts made wise by God see the need of others clearly and they thoughtfully, winsomely, persuasively call others to God's wisdom.

If the course of your life has been changed from death to life you want to tell others about it. You want to persuade others to taste and see that God is good and that Christ is a refuge from all their sin. Christ has opened our eyes to God's grace and made us wise with a message of hope and forgiveness. We have all seen examples of what's been called "cancel culture" in the last couple of years. It seems like everyday there's a new story. Against this backdrop the Church today stands starkly in contrast. Because of Christ we have a forgiveness culture. Do you see how powerful and persuasive this is? While the world may one day decide cancel you and try to destroy your reputation or seek to have your employment terminated because of something in your past, Jesus never will.

Look at Jesus in Luke 4:40

**SLIDE**

*40 Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.*

"Every one of them."

It didn't matter where they had come from or what they had done. All that came to Jesus were healed, This was a taste of the healing that will one day come to all who are in his kingdom. Because of Christ, it doesn't matter any more where people come from. It only matters that they come to Jesus and the wisdom of God in our own hearts will cause us to see people differently, have compassion differently, and have a different answer to meet their greatest need.

A theologian once said that "Christianity is one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread." In Christ we have found bread that satisfies and a fountain that never runs dry and a heart wise in Christ will invite others to eat and drink.

This is our last point in this section

**SLIDE**

**C) The Wise Have a Fountain, Fools Have a Drain (22)**

We've reached the middle and the central point of this section of Proverbs.

**SLIDE**

**Proverbs 16:22**

*22 Good sense is a fountain of life to him who has it, but the instruction of fools is folly.*

The wisest thing we could ever do is put our trust in Christ. In coming to him our relationship with God is healed, our relationship with others is healed, our hearts become satisfied with righteousness instead of sin and if we ever get off course he beckons us to return. God in his mercy has made us wise in Christ and as we continually come to him, we are continually refreshed. God will never shut off the tap. The invitation to drink is open and constant. For a fountain to be a fountain the water must keep running. Jesus himself is the fountain of life. When he meets a woman far from God on the fringes of society, this is what he says to her in John 4:10-14:

**SLIDE**

**John 4:10-14**

*10 "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." 11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." 13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*



God's wisdom is like a fountain welling up to eternal life and it comes through faith in Jesus. But foolish pride is like a drain bringing down to death. Just like a fountain will continually run and flow, a foolish heart will continually drain. It's a black hole with an insatiable appetite that's always taking and never satisfied.

While the wisdom of trusting God will lead to overflowing wisdom, the foolishness of rejecting God will only lead to more errors. The path you are on matters. There are good consequences on God's good path. As verse 17 said, those who turn aside from evil will preserve their lives. But the arrogant and the foolish who turn away from God won't discover good or have their souls healed by the sweetness of God's gracious word. Instead they will be lured away by smaller satisfactions in life and will realize too late that in the selfish pursuit of their kingdom over God's, they are circling the gaping drain of death.

Jesus concludes one of his parables by saying in

**SLIDE**

**Matthew 25:29**

*29 To everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance.  
But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.*

And I think the same line of thinking applies to our passage today. The fountain of life, Jesus Christ, will continually fill our souls to overflowing with wisdom that leads to eternal life. The foolish, prideful path makes promises that it cannot keep, delivering only distraction on the way to destruction.

In the last section we saw that those whose hearts become wise desire to call others onto wisdom's path. This is yet another way that wisdom is like a fountain. Not only will it change us, but others will be changed as well. The wisdom of God that we've received brings life to us and brings life to others through us. Overflowing life, leading to overflowing life with Jesus as the fountainhead.

But Christ's wisdom isn't the only voice crying out.

In the second part of verse 22 it says

**Proverbs 16:22**

*...the instruction of fools is folly*

People will experience life when they learn from those who humbly trust God's words or they will experience death when they learn from those who arrogantly reject God's words. Before us are two paths. Neither of them are lonely. Both are full of people calling out to your heart today. You have a choice before you: Which path will you walk on and which path will you be calling from?

Every life leaves a legacy, especially in our homes with our families. In this room today there are many first generation Christians, but there are also many here who are part of a legacy of faith 2, 3, or 4 or more generations deep. The fountain continues to overflow for us and for all who would follow behind us. Moms and Dads here today, do your children know that you love the Lord? Do your actions show them that you find your hope in him?

Are you teaching them to pray, and how to read their Bibles? Do you read God's word in your home? Do your children know from your actions that Jesus is a fountain of life that will satisfy the deepest desires of their hearts and that following his path is the only path that leads to life? I don't mean to only speak to parents here today either. Think of how many lives any of us intersect with each day whether relational or professional. If you have found Jesus you can help others resist the instruction of fools and find everlasting life in the living waters of his word.

Trusting in God's word is the path to life, we've talked a lot about it today, but it's not the only path. This is our final point for today.

#### **SLIDE**

### **3) Trusting in Our Arrogant Heart is the Path to Death**

Here is our final verse from our main passage and we'll be concluding here shortly.

#### **SLIDE**

#### **Proverbs 16:25**

*25 There is a way that seems right to a man,  
but its end is the way to death.*

Without God's word we wouldn't even know that there was a path. We would only do what seemed right to us and, indeed, this is how our world operates today. Billions of individualists encouraging each other to live *their* truth while denying *the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life of Jesus Christ.

From the outside, it looks like billions of paths being blazed individually and yet they're all one path, the one that isn't the highway of the upright. It looks like a counter culture, but it's conformity. It is not the brave path, it's the path of least resistance straight down the drain. The prideful fool is too arrogant to see that they aren't charting a new course - apart from God, they're on the inevitable one.

Today we have seen that there is a choice.

There is a promise of life and a warning of destruction.

And every decision we make reveals our heart before God.

Will we ignore the warning, disbelieve God, trust in ourselves, and make our own path?

Or will we heed the warnings, believe God, trust in his word, turn aside from evil, and get on his path?

If today you want to make a change and get on God's path but you don't know where to start, start with God's word. Read the Gospel of John and then read Romans. We need God's word. The wisdom in its pages are more valuable than Gold. There is no way for us to be on God's path without it. Sunday morning will not be enough.

What does it mean to trust in the Lord? We must start with trusting God's word. Because it is where everything we should believe about him is revealed and in it's pages we will find commands and promises that bring healing to our bones and sweetness to our souls, but our hearts must bow to him.

In our lives we are going to be tempted to choose the sweetness that the world offers, but it leads to death. We know this because Christ died for it.

Without Christ, all of the wrong turns we have taken that seemed right to us in our own eyes would have certainly led us to disappointment, pain, and sorrows in this life and the next, but Jesus is God's word and God's wisdom and the fountain of life for us today.

Our gracious God has given us his Christ, and his word and his Spirit. Without them we would be pulled by the drain of our own foolishness but now the wisdom of God flows to us today. Can you imagine doing life without wisdom? Thankfully we don't have to. The way that seems right to a man is now not the only way. Choose Christ and his way and find life.