

Proverbs 22-01-04b

We're ready now to resume our study in Proverbs chapter four. This is pretty straightforward exhortation here. It speaks for itself.

There are a couple of quick things I would like to mention. Hear my children the instruction of a father and give attention to no understanding. This tells us that what has been passed on to the son or sons is of universal application to everyone.

There are people who say, well, my paternal experience was not that happy. There have been people who have tried to sort of second guess God and say, we're not going to call God the father because some people had a really bad father and it brings up memories and so on. In the case where maybe that someone's father wasn't all that they could have or should have been, the Bible gives us that exhortation, that wisdom and that guidance from a father who is good, who is faithful, who received these things from his own father.

And what we lack in experience is provided for us in God's excellent word. So here is the instruction from a father and we need not say, well, I've missed out and it's a hopeless mishmash because my father wasn't what he should have been. Some of us had very wonderful, excellent, godly fathers, and we can praise God for that.

But not everybody had that experience. There are people that are raised in single parent homes and for whatever reason, they don't have that human experience. That is not a limitation in the plan and purpose of God.

What we should get from a good father is present in God's word and comes to us in an even greater and more distilled form from our heavenly father via the words of the father that we find in places such as this. So here, my children, the instruction of a father. If you didn't get it in experience, you get it here.

And if anything, this is at least the equal of anything our earthly father could have shared with us. And in many ways, it is better. This is the inspired divine truth of God distilled as instruction from a father to sons, to a children.

Give attention if you want to know understanding. I give you good doctrine. Do not forsake my law.

Notice the appropriation of divine wisdom by this father. I'm going to give you good doctrine that has been handed down to me. Its original source is God, but now it is mine.

It belongs to me. My law. When I was my father's son, here's where we pick up in verse three, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother.

Let me ask you something. Is this guy no longer his father's son? The speaker. If you just

rip this out of its context, when I was my, see, he's not his father's son anymore.

He's, he's repudiated his father. He's abandoned as far as father abandoned him. Not at all.

Look at the context and let's be reasonable and be sensitive to the idea that this man is presenting to his sons, to his children. When I was my father's son, IE, before I became independent and had sons of my own, I was once in your position. I was once under authority in my father's home.

I was my father's son. This is not speaking just of relationship or paternity or descendancy. It is position.

I was my father's son, meaning I was in the home subject to my father's will and instruction. Tender. Here's your clue.

I wasn't mature. I wasn't independent. I had not bar mitzvahed and become a, an independent man with my own home, my own wife, my own children in early days, when I was in your position and the only one in the sight of my mother, the only one in the sight of my mother.

This is a principle that you can find, for example, back in first Chronicles. If you look in chapter 29, verse one, first Chronicles 29, one, furthermore, King David said to all the assembly, my son, Solomon, whom alone God has chosen. My son, Solomon, David had several wives, several sons, but in terms of the throne, David says, my son, Solomon, whom alone God has chosen is young and inexperienced.

And the work is great because the temple is not for man, but for the Lord God. David knows that Solomon is going to be the next King and that under his reign, God's temple is going to be built. The first temple, Solomon's temple, it is generally called, but he's young and inexperienced and the work is great.

David gives Solomon general instruction in wisdom, in doctrine, in the work of his hands. Solomon exhorts him to cultivate and nourish and strengthen his relationship with God so that his practical undertakings will flourish and that God will bless the work of his hands. David doesn't say, bring me the finest architects and the greatest engineers and the most proficient craftsmen.

I want Solomon to meet them and learn what they know and have them help him with the temple. David starts with this instruction we find in Proverbs chapter four. Solomon is the author of the Proverbs and we have no reason to think otherwise.

They are so named at the opening verse. Then this is Solomon saying and repeating the words of his father. When I was my father's son, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother.

Here's a Bible trivia question for you. How many sons did Bathsheba have? Ah, you're wise and careful. How many sons did Bathsheba have? Two.

The first one died. The second one lived. A foreshadowing in the same way that the doves in Leviticus 14, there are two.

One dies. The other is daubed in its blood and lives. David's son dies for David's sins.

And yet God's promise of a son to sit on his throne and establish his kingdom is fulfilled. And God uses two sons to picture the work of the single son of David who will come a thousand years later. So tender and the only one in the sight of my mother.

And you can imagine how much Bathsheba valued Solomon having lost her firstborn. She would have been very invested in the son that came afterward. So when I was my father's son, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, he, my father also taught me and said to me, I think this is Solomon who is writing these Proverbs for, you know, how many sons did Solomon have with 700 wives and 300 concubines? I would say this would have been, uh, if somebody wanted a mega church, uh, Solomon could have had a mega church just of his own offspring.

This is what David told Solomon in verse four, let your heart retain my words. Isn't this the difficulty? We hear it. We understand it.

We agree with it. We know it's true. But when the time comes to implement it some kind of way, it has flown out one of the open windows of our mind.

Let your heart retain my words. What's the best way to remember things? What's the best way to retain it? If you learn a memory verse is not my word, like a fire saith the Lord and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces. I want to remember that verse.

So what do I do? I come back to it and I say, Oh, Jeremiah 23, 29. And I say it, I bring it back to mind. I repeat it.

There are some memory verses in Proverbs chapter four. Listen to the King James of Proverbs four and see if you do not hear some familiar words. Proverbs chapter four.

I learned these when I was at CEF camp and we had a little verse pages to memorize. And then we would have quote downs and you would stand up against somebody from another team and they would ask you a verse. If you said it correctly, you went to the end of the line.

If you goofed, then you had to sit down, especially if the other team's guy said it right. But if you listen to Proverbs chapter four in the original King James, which is what resonates to my ear, this is verse 14, enter not into the path of the wicked and go not in the way of evil men, avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away. 419, the way of

the wicked is as darkness.

They know not at what they stumble. I learned that one with my mom when I was about five years old. The way of the wicked is as darkness.

They know not at what they stumble. Memorable. This wisdom needs to be reviewed, needs to be rehearsed, needs to be called to mind.

If we are going to fulfill the exhortation to not let it depart out of our heart, let your heart retain my words. Verse four, keep my commands and live. This is quality of life.

Everybody wants a good quality of life. Standard of living is a measure of quality of life. The poverty level, the definition of poverty is people don't have a good quality of life.

Everybody wants comfort, peace, security, provision, some perks, some blessings above and beyond subsistence level. Everybody wants those. The Bible tells us exactly how to have them.

Even in the midst of non-ideal circumstances. Maybe you are below the poverty line. Maybe work is a tribulation.

Maybe you've got a pill for a boss, a bitter pill. Maybe circumstances are not all they could be, but God has the power to grant us quality of life without depending on circumstances. In spite of circumstances, Paul can say, whatever state I find myself, I'm content.

Not because God fixes every circumstance, heals every broken thing, but he gives me divine power on the inside. Let your heart retain my words. Keep my commands.

Do what you know you're supposed to do and live. Live quality of life. So how do we do this? Get wisdom.

This is why we're here. We are here getting wisdom. This word forget, it says, get wisdom, get understanding.

And look down at verse seven. Wisdom is the principal thing. Therefore, get wisdom and in all your getting, get understanding.

This getting, this word forgetting means to obtain in a very specific way. It is used in Ruth of Boaz, getting a wife, obtaining, acquiring, coming into possession of in a meaningful and permanent way. So what do we want to do with wisdom? It's not just exposure.

It's not just hearing it and saying, boy, that is really good. It's not the seed that is planted in the shallow soil that springs up in joy for a day, but then the sun beats on it and it withers. And, you know, a week later you look and you could never tell there was

anything there.

This word forget means to acquire and obtain in a permanent and meaningful way, like acquiring Ruth as a wife for Boaz. Get wisdom, get understanding. Notice again, do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.

The idea that once you get these, you've got to make an effort. This requires conscious, purposeful planning and execution to not let it slip away because it will. It doesn't come and just attach itself to us.

We have to consciously maintain a grip. So how do we do this? What are our basic tools for retaining the word of God in our soul? Well, there are churches where people come and hear good expository teaching of the word of God, but their Bible and their notebook sits on the folding chair until the next Bible class. I can tell you that is not the way.

That is not the way. If you've got to look for your Bible, the next time there's Bible class, that is not the way. This Bible is such a precious possession for the 99.995% of human history.

People did not have the ability to carry a copy of the word of God around with them. Nobody in ancient Israel had it. Maybe a scrap, maybe a verse, if they could read.

You remember there was a profession called scribes. Those were the guys that could read and write. Your basic Israelites might be able to do ciphers.

They might be able to scratch out numbers or recognize the letters of the alphabet to represent numbers so that they account for cattle and sheep and engage in financial transactions. But the majority of these people were not carrying around anything resembling a Bible. We have got the entire Old Testament, the entire New Testament, multiple copies laying everywhere.

If you want to retain, if you want to remember, if you want to possess and not forget, review is required. And this is a conscious effort. Maybe I'm not going to take the Bible and read it for 15 minutes.

Let me at least turn to the last page we studied in class, grab a verse or two and think about it while I'm on the road, while I'm engaged in a routine task, while I'm folding clothes or loading the dishwasher or whatever. Give me something to chew on. This is a command.

Let your heart retain my words. Our Heavenly Father is speaking to us as sons and children and saying, let your heart retain my words. Do not forsake or do not forget.

Do not turn away from the words of my mouth. What did Jesus say? Man shall not live by bread alone, but by what? Every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God. Do you

think Jesus knew this verse from the Proverbs? Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth, says the Father to the Son.

Do not forsake her. She will preserve you. Preservation.

This is salvation. This is protection. This is provision in times of distress, times of trouble.

So we often say, you know, there's so much wonderful description of a great life and blessing and prosperity and a future and go to glory and throng with the saints and the rest of it. But I've got a life to live right now. And this road is rough.

I am bumping into sharp things. My shins are bruised. My knees are bloody from falling down.

Where is God? In terms of providing for me and protecting me and giving me the strength that I need to not just survive, but to do well and to spiritually prosper. Where is it? Answer. You're looking at it.

This is the how to. It doesn't get any more real than this. If you want to have a happy, productive, fruitful, joyful, spirit-fruited life.

If you want to be the tree planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth his fruit in his season, his leaf does not wither and whatsoever he does prospers. This is the how to. You got a better how to than this? Get my words, get wisdom, get understanding and retain it.

Think about it all the time. Call it to mind. Now calling to mind the exhortation to call it to mind isn't the power.

What is it we're calling to mind? There is some content here, right? Do not forsake her. Verse six, she will preserve you, love her and she will keep you. If you love somebody, what do you do? You stay in contact, right? You talk.

You interact. You explore and cultivate and build this relationship, right? If you love someone, you don't wait five years and say, I wonder how old so-and-so. I just love them to pieces.

Haven't heard from them in double digit months. Those that we love, we keep in contact with. We interact.

We know what's going on with them. They know what's going on with us. Love her.

She will keep you. She will guard you. Wisdom is the principle thing.

Therefore, get wisdom and in all you're getting, get understanding. Understanding comes from contemplation, from chewing on it. Well, if this is what God says, where's

the practical application for me today in my relationship, in my job, in my effort, in my relaxation, in my free time, how I choose to invest it.

You got to make this the principle thing, the first priority. Exalt her, verse eight, and she will promote you. Remember how the fool gets promoted by his shame? He becomes exalted and famous for shameful things.

Wisdom, if you exalt her, she will promote you. Remember, God will scorn those who scorn him. God will lightly esteem those who lightly esteem him.

Exalt her, she will promote you. She will bring you honor when you embrace her. And this word embrace is the one that means to embrace a person, to embrace a wife, to hug, to treat as valuable and precious and loved.

Think about how you feel when you hug someone that is one of your primary loved ones. You hug them and it's a pleasure and you want to express to them your affection and your appreciation, your esteem, how much of a priority they are to you. That's what a hug means.

That's what this means. God's wisdom, the words from his mouth, hug them, appreciate them, pray them back to God. Lord, I love what you said when you said this.

Do you think God is going to appreciate us when we know what he said so well that we can pray it to him without looking? This is no small thing. This is no casual pastime, no side hobby. Well, I'll do some Christian things here every once in a while.

I'll do a Bible thing, you know, a couple, three, four times a week. That's not love. That's not the principal thing.

Hug it like you would hug your mom. Frequently, she will place on your head an ornament of grace, a crown of glory she will deliver to you. Remember when we were doing the song of the Shulamite, aka song of Solomon, and the Shulamite said Solomon's mother came and placed a wedding crown on his head.

This is the same word. Embrace her as you would a wife, and she will put this wedding crown. You will be wedded.

You will be companions together through life. The personification of wisdom here is not just hug her like your mom. This is hug her like your wife.

Embrace her, be intimate with her, be married to her, and she will be faithful to you like the most wonderful wife there ever was. Any relationship that we may not fully enjoy in this life through death, through circumstance, don't have a father, God supplies it. Don't have a wife, God supplies it.

Wisdom can be your wife. Wisdom can be that companion that you embrace and that

crowns you and satisfies you and gives you fulfillment and blessing and meaningful contribution and investment in the life to come. So verse 10, hear my son, this is getting individual and personal now.

Started out with sons in verse one, verse 10, hear my son, receive my sayings. This father is just leaning forward, earnestly hoping that the son will pay attention and grab hold of this hard one knowledge that comes from experience. The speaker here is saying, look, my father passed this on to me.

I am no longer his son. I'm not in his household. I'm not the tender only one in the side of my mother.

I'm out here. I have lived by these precepts. I have traveled this road and I'm here to tell you it is the only worthwhile road.

If you ever had, you know, 30 years of experience on somebody else, they're just starting out. You're down the road two or three decades and you say, I've got a few tips for you. You can save yourself a lot of grief if you'll listen to what I'm saying.

You haven't had the experience. I know this by hard one experience. Please just trust me on this, but they don't.

They have to learn the same way we did. We didn't trust somebody trying to tell us, well, yeah, sure. Oh yes.

Yeah. Thank you for that. And we go our own way and we get our degree from the school of hard knocks, but in the spiritual realm, it is possible to take this on board and avoid wasting life, wasting time, wasting opportunity that we can't get back.

So this father says, listen, my son, the word here means, listen, please pay attention. I can't ask you earnestly enough. Please take this on board.

Receive my sayings. The years of your life will be many. This is a metaphor length of days.

Long life is a metaphor for quality of life and prosperity in it. A long life is no fun when, when you're grinding along in abject misery, 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.

She is your life. Now here's your content beginning in verse 14. Do not enter the path of the wicked.

Do not walk in the way of evil, avoid it. Do not travel on it. Turn away from it and pass on.

These are the last two verses we're going to look at. And these, did you ever wonder what is the difference in the wicked and the evil? These are both plural nouns. This really ought to say, do not enter the path of wicked ones and do not walk in the way of evil ones.

What's the difference in wickedness and evil? Looking at these Hebrew words, you can check them online if you want to see the actual Hebrew words, but I will tell you the one that is translated wicked is translated wicked 450 odd times in the old Testament. What does it mean to be wicked? This word emphasizes the internal problem. These are criminally hearted ones.

They are guilty. Wicked describes their quality, the quality of their hearts. They are intrinsically choosers of badness and their pattern of life is criminal.

Their quality is that of corruption, waywardness, and lawlessness. When you see the word wicked in the old Testament, it is emphasizing the internal quality of that wicked person. If he's a wicked king, if he's a wicked man, if he is the wicked, if it is the plural, it is the group, the wicked, it is an emphasis on the internal problem they have that creates this pattern of criminal, guilty behavior.

You can just put criminal, guilty, quality, internal. Evil ones, the word translated evil here, this is what it causes. These are the results.

It is ruinous. It is painful. It is destructive.

The word evil is the consequences, and it can be both personal to that individual, but we've talked about blessing by association and cursing by association. This is cursing by association. Their presence and their actions create ruin, pain, destruction, hardship, spreads like a malignancy, creates rot.

That's wicked. So it says, do not enter the path of these that have this inner quality of guilty criminal corruption. And there are times when you may not be able to put your finger on any particular bad thing that someone did, but being around them, hearing them express what is in their heart, you know that this is their nature.

It speaks of their nature, and you can determine, you can sense what someone's nature is, even if you haven't seen them do anything bad. They're just, wow, that is somebody I don't want to be associated with. When they talk, it's scary, scary bad.

Do not walk in the way of, you don't enter the path of the wicked, and you don't walk in the way. Remember Psalm 11, blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. The

way, this is again a pattern, right? A path establishes a direction.

A way suggests ongoing travel. Jesus says, I am the way. He's not a momentary fix.

He's a pattern of life, right? It's one step in front of another for the duration of our life. Jesus is the way. You can see a path without taking it away.

You travel it, and it becomes a pattern of life. Do not walk in the way of evil. This is where the pattern of life, and you can see its consequences.

You see its outcome. It just sprouts and fosters evil. Evil begets evil.

Sin begets clusters of sin. Now in verse 15, avoid it, do not travel on it, turn away from it, and pass on. There are three verbs here, because one of them is repeated.

The first one that says avoid, very interesting. The first definition of this word is to lead, to take charge. That's what it means.

The second definition is to uncover, or it's even translated to be naked in a couple of places, to be uncovered. And it comes to mean to avoid a thing. Why would you avoid something? Well, if you uncover its nature, if you see it for what it is, and you say, I am taking charge of this situation, and I am not going to participate in, follow, or be otherwise associated with this thing, there is an element of leadership.

You have to lead yourself. Remember back in, I believe it's Genesis 4, 19, where God is talking to Cain, and he says, sin lies crouching at the door, but you must master it. It's a different verb there.

That's mashal, but you must take charge. You've got to be the master in that situation. When sin is crouching at the door, you've got to step up and take charge of that post and all government property and view.

You've got to say, look, this is my responsibility. I'm not a victim here. I've got a choice, and I choose, now that I've uncovered this and seen what it is, I'm not taken this way.

I am going to avoid it. But that avoidance is based on perception and taking responsibility. Great word.

It's far more than just avoid it. This is avoid based on seeing it for what it is and having the take charge attitude in your soul to move yourself away. Sin is crouching at the door.

You've got to take charge of that situation. Be sure you don't get pounced on. You're responsible.

I'm not blaming sin for surprising you. I told you it's at the door. You've got to take charge and be sure it doesn't get you.

Same thing here. There's the way of the wicked. There is the path of the evil, and you're responsible to not go down that road.

It's on you. The road is there. God's not going to take the road away yet.

It's on you to not take it. The second verb here is do not travel on it. This word for travel means to go along.

Travel is a good translation, but it's travel on it. Bo, which is in it. Do not travel in it.

The third word means to turn away, turn aside, and you're looking at it. The road is straight in front of you. If you just keep going the way you're going, you're going to be on that road.

You have to stop, uncover the problem with this road, and you have to turn. Remember when we were talking about throwing pearls before swine, and Jesus said, don't do that because they will turn. They were going in a direction, but they are going to turn.

What does it mean that you're going to turn aside? If you don't turn aside, you're going to be on that road. If you do nothing, you're going to be on this road. You've got to identify it.

You've got to take charge of your own direction, and then you've got to say, I'm not going to travel on this road. This road's right in front of me. All I've got to do is do nothing, and I'm going to be on this road.

See it. Recognize that it's my responsibility to not walk that road. Now I've got to turn.

I have to make a change of some kind so that I don't end up on that road. Turn from it. It doesn't say, don't turn down it.

I'm going this way. There's a side road. Well, just don't take that side road.

It says, this road's straight in front of you. You have to turn to not be on it. Turn from it, and then the fourth word here, pass on, it's the very same word that says, don't travel.

It says, you're going to travel, but don't travel on it. Keep traveling, but don't travel on it. You're going to continue to make progress.

You're going to continue to travel, but not on that road. A lot to think about in verse 14 and 15. The path and the way are going to be presented directly in front of us.

The easiest thing is just to keep going. You know how they say, evil prevails when good men do nothing. Well, evil will prevail over us if we don't recognize it, see our responsibility, turn from it, and travel a different way.

This is the content of the wisdom that David is telling Solomon, and Solomon is telling his

sons, and God is telling us as his children, this is what you have to do if wisdom is going to be your companion and is going to bless you with long life and a crown of grace and confer all of these other benefits, both now and in the eternal ages to come. Now is the time to take these principles and these doctrines on board and prioritize them. Wisdom is the principal thing.

Get wisdom. Well, here's the first chunk. Figure out what the evil way is and the wicked path and make sure you don't travel it.

To do that, you're going to have to turn. Something has to change. If you find yourself on an evil way or a wicked path, there's some turning.

Jesus expresses this in plucking out the eye and cutting off the hand. Whatever is causing you to end up on this path, that has to be eliminated, and it may be something of a violent change. It's not literal, but it can be as traumatic in terms of giving up something that is dragging us down the wrong path, leading us down the wrong way, and if we don't turn from it, we can never enjoy the benefits that God designed us to have and to express and to bless others with in this life.

A lot to think about. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for granting us the words from your mouth, which are wisdom and truth and knowledge.

We pray that your Holy Spirit will illuminate our hearts, help us to take them seriously, and to see their pertinence and application in our own lives. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.