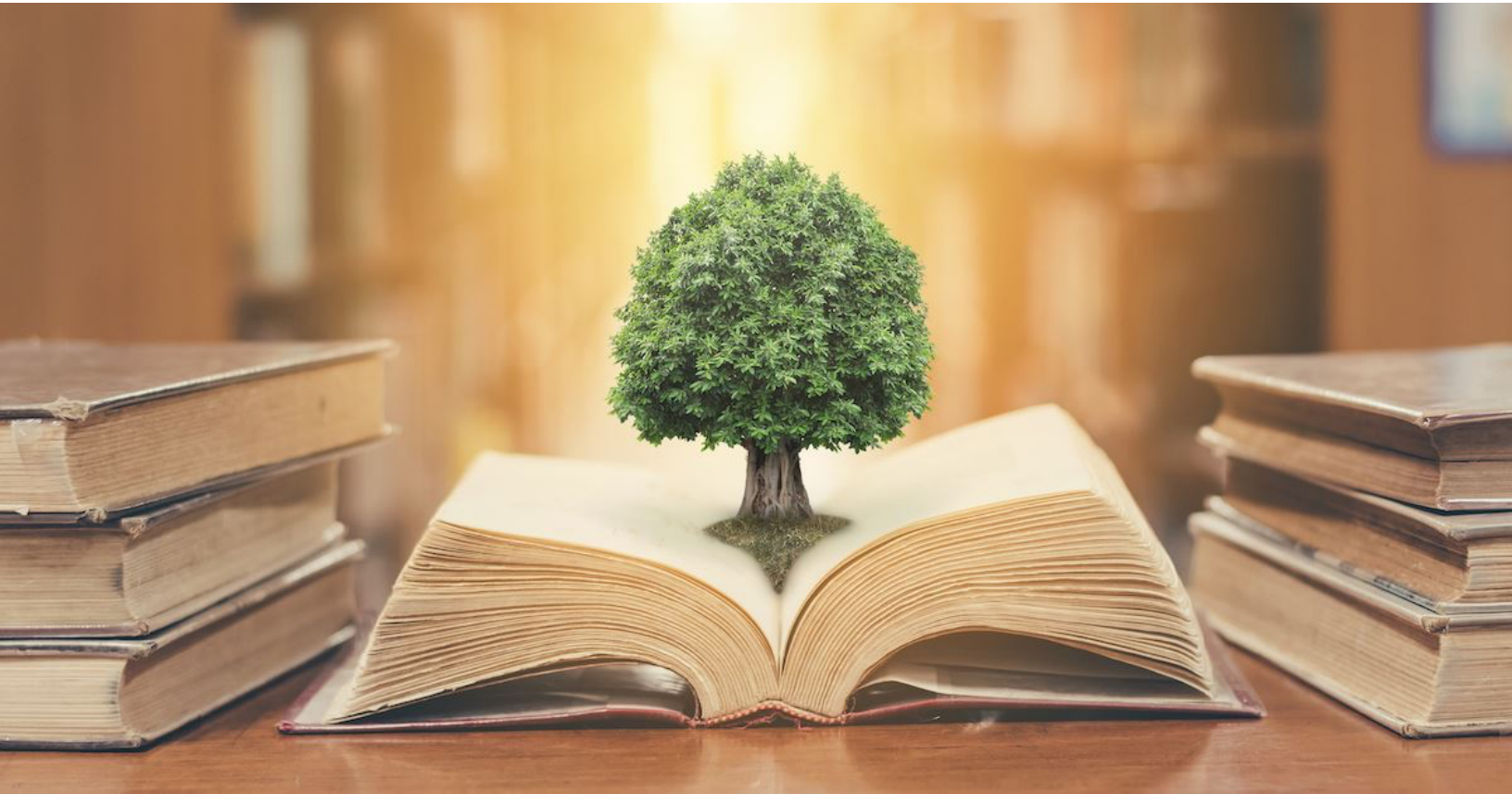


# **THE WISDOM OF PROVERBS**

**Second Baptist Church  
Summer Curriculum Series**



**June 2020**



# WEEK ONE

## PROVERBS 1:7-19

Have you ever known someone who wouldn't listen to good advice? They were in a situation where you could see their decisions were going to lead to a mistake or even pain. You told them what they were doing would harm them, yet they still did it. They wouldn't listen to what you say. If you've had children, you know this feeling all too well. While it's easy to recognize this in other people and easy to see how someone should listen to wise counsel, it can sometimes be hard to recognize it in our own lives.

### HAVE YOU EVER GIVEN ADVICE THAT'S BEEN IGNORED? HAVE YOU EVER IGNORED WISE ADVICE AND THEN REGRETTED IT?

As we dive into Proverbs, we will encounter a wealth of Godly wisdom. Like much of the wisdom gained in life, it can come from times we ignored wise counsel. This week we'll see the fool's response to wisdom and the consequences the fool faces.

**Proverbs 1:7** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

If you have not memorized Proverbs 1:7 yet, I would encourage you to do so over the course of this study. As we seek God's wisdom, we must start at the beginning. As the writer says, **the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge**. The best way I know to describe the fear of the Lord is this: fearing God is simply recognizing who He is and who we are in relation to Him. Once we realize how holy and mighty God is and how sinful and weak we are, then the only response is holy fear and humble worship. Only then can we humble ourselves and accept God's wisdom over our own.

As we venture into Proverbs, it will become ever more apparent how true God's words are in Isaiah 55:8-9, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." The wise man understands that and humbles himself before the Lord. The fool, however, will **despise wisdom and instruction**. The wise will be open to reproof and discipline from God whereas the fool will bristle against it. Proverbs will cause you to look at your thinking and behavior in order to see whether it lines up with

God's standards. Sometimes, you may be right in line with its teachings. Sometimes, you will have to decide to change your life in order to fall in line with scripture. The fool will not want to change. Let's hope during this journey you choose the wise path!

## **HAS THERE BEEN A TIME WHEN YOU REALIZED YOUR LIFE DIDN'T LINE UP WITH THE TEACHINGS OF SCRIPTURE? WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME OF THAT SITUATION?**

**Proverbs 1:8-9** Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.

The son is called to **hear...your father's instruction and forsake not your mother's teaching**. The son is presented with Godly wisdom, he cannot claim ignorance to God's commands. He has been given the tools to make the right decision, if only he will hear it and apply it. We receive God's wisdom from His Word and often God uses others to present His wisdom to us. The wise child of God will listen to those who give Godly wisdom.

## **WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME SOURCES OF GODLY WISDOM IN YOUR LIFE? WHO DO YOU SEEK OUT FOR ADVICE WHEN YOU NEED IT?**

**Proverbs 1:10-14** My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason; like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse."

The father warns his son against participating in criminal activity. He says **if sinners entice you, do not consent**. While God has His means of passing His wisdom to us, He isn't the only influence on us. Worldly influences are all around us. The sinners promise to **find all precious goods** and to fill **our houses with plunder**. The sinner's promise is that the son can gain wealth without having to earn it. They offer him an easy way to satisfy his greed. While he can gain what he wants without working for it, it comes at the cost of others. These criminals tempt the son to **lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason**.

While becoming a criminal might not be a huge temptation for you, the desire to gain without work or at the cost of others might be. It may come in the simple things in life. In your home, who gets to drink the last of the milk? Who gets the last cup of coffee from the pot? If you go to Walmart today in need of toilet paper and there's only one pack left, do you let the other

person in the aisle take it or do you grab it yourself? These minor instances show either our true selfishness or our true selflessness. Even small decisions during the day can show you where your heart is focused: on self or on others.

## **WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU PRACTICALLY LIVE AS A SELFISH PERSON? WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PRACTICE SELFLESSNESS TODAY?**

**Proverbs 1:15-19** My son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths, for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird, but these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain.

What is the best way to avoid falling into sin with others? The father says to **not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths**. If you walk the path of a sinner then you are going to end up at the same destination as that sinner. This is where we walk a fine line as Christians. This is not teaching to avoid the presence of sinners. In fact, as Christians, we are called to engage the lost for the sake of Christ. We cannot simply shun every lost person in our lives and live in our own Christian bubble. However, we must be careful not to be negatively influenced by those we are attempting to positively impact. The teaching is to not walk in the way of sinner, therefore we are not to participate in their sinful acts or lifestyle. We can still attempt relational evangelism with the lost, but we must do so while continuing to walk on our own path of uprightness.

## **TAKE A MOMENT TO CONSIDER THE FRIENDS IN YOUR LIFE. ARE ALL OF YOUR FRIENDS CHRISTIAN? DO YOU HAVE ANY LOST FRIENDS? IF YOU DO, HOW ARE YOU INTENTIONALLY TRYING TO REACH THEM FOR CHRIST?**

The father warns his son that **in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird, but these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors**. The father advises that seeking to gain at the cost of others is as vain a pursuit as spreading a net in front of a bird. A bird will not be fooled by a net spread in its sight. In the same way, the sinners looking to ambush the innocent are simply laying a trap for themselves.

The principle here is that sinful people will reap the punishment of their sinful acts. That may not necessarily happen immediately. We all know of people who have committed sinful acts without immediate repercussions, but that doesn't mean they won't ever suffer the

consequences. The nature of sin brings instant gratification to a fleshly desire. It certainly would be easier to avoid sin if the consequences are immediate. Unfortunately, that's just not the case. People can sin for years without it catching up to them. But the consequences will come. The wise man, like the father writing to his son, recognizes that the ultimate result of sin is destruction. He can see it even if the son can't.

For us, God is the father warning us that our actions can either bring Him glory or bring us destruction. He knows the right path for us to walk and gives us great guidance through His word and wise counsel in our lives. We simply have to listen and apply it.

## **PERSONAL STUDY**

As we close this week's lesson, take a few moments to read **Proverbs 1:20-33**. In these verses you will see additional consequences to not listening to wisdom. As you read, answer the following questions:

- **What are some of the benefits of listening to wisdom?**
- **What are some of the consequences of ignoring wisdom?**
- **What is your honest reaction to hearing wise words of reproof?**

# WEEK TWO

## PROVERBS 2:1-15

If...then. We've all used this conditional statement. IF you eat your vegetables, THEN you will get dessert. IF you work hard, THEN you'll get a promotion. IF you drive past a traffic camera going more than 9 miles over the speed limit, THEN you'll get your picture taken! The idea is that IF the first part of the statement is true, THEN the second part of the statement will also be true. Chapter 2 begins with a list of IF's that lead to THEN's. This week we'll discuss those IF's and whether or not they are true in our lives.

**Proverbs 2:1** My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you

Last week we saw the fool's reaction to wisdom. This week, we see the wise son's reaction to the wisdom given by his father. The first IF is to **receive** God's **words** of wisdom. The way we approach Scripture determines how it affects our lives. If you look to God's Word as good advice to take into consideration from time to time, then it will impact your life from time to time. If you look to God's Word simply for nice sayings to decorate your house, then it will be just that: nice sayings decorating your house. But if you approach the Bible as God's living Word, if you receive it's words as the very words from God, then it can and will impact every facet of your life. So our approach to Proverbs and every passage of Scripture is incredibly important to allowing it to change our lives.

### HOW DO YOU VIEW THE BIBLE? WHAT ACTIONS DO YOU TAKE THAT PROVE GOD'S WORD IS IMPORTANT IN YOUR LIFE?

He calls on his son to **treasure up my commandments**. What do you do with your most precious possessions? Some may keep them in a safe deposit box at the bank. Some may keep them locked up in the garage. Some may just stick it under the mattress. What this shows is when we treasure something, we seek to protect it. We put it in a safe place. God calls us to treasure His word. We must keep it in a safe place. Does that mean we need to keep our Bibles in a safe deposit box? Of course not! The best place to treasure God's commandments is to memorize them so that the Holy Spirit can bring God's Word to mind when we need it most.

### DO YOU MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE? WHAT CAN YOU DO TODAY TO GROW IN THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION?

**Proverbs 2:2** Making your ear attentive to wisdom and incline your heart to understanding

The father calls on the son to make his **ear attentive to wisdom**. If you have kids, or a spouse for that matter, then you know there is a big difference between hearing and listening. I know there are times when my children hear my voice. I also know that most of those times, while they hear my voice, they're not listening to my words. When I call out to my children, it often includes a command that requires action. Sometimes it's to stop what they are doing (if they are wrestling). Sometimes it's a call to an action (like cleaning their room). Sometimes it's a command to move closer (Get in here RIGHT NOW!). I know when they are hearing and not listening by their lack of action according to my command.

We cannot follow God's commands if we are not even listening in the first place. Being fully transparent, there are times in my life where I am hearing God's word but not listening. It can come during times where I'm reading the Word and my mind wanders. Don't tell Pastor Justin, but there are times when my mind wanders while God's Word is being preached. Can you relate to those times? It's in those moments we may hear God's Word, but we're not truly listening. And it's in those times where we are missing out on the treasure of wisdom His Word offers.

### **WHAT STEPS DO YOU TAKE IN ORDER TO GIVE YOUR FULL ATTENTION TO GOD'S WORD AND TRULY LISTEN TO HIS WISDOM?**

Listening involves not only hearing, or in this case reading, the Word of God, but actually understanding what it says and how you should act upon it. Here God encourages you to listen attentively to the wisdom given and to **incline your heart to understanding** that wisdom. Understanding Scripture leads to change in our heart. When we understand Scripture then we recognize areas of our lives where our thoughts and actions don't line up with God's commands. It's in these moments where our hearts must be more inclined to God's wisdom than to our flesh's desires.

### **WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU CHANGED YOUR THOUGHTS OR ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE TEACHING OF THE BIBLE? WHAT MIGHT GOD BE LEADING YOU TO CHANGE TODAY?**

**Proverbs 2:3:** Yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding

Have you ever just needed a word from God? Remember those moments where life seemed uncertain and you raised your voice to God praying for an answer? Those moments tend to



come during great times of trial, but our fervor for God's wisdom shouldn't just come during difficult times. We can cry out to God with the same earnestness every time we approach Scripture. The writer encourages the reader to **call out for insight and raise our voice for understanding**. How do we do this? Every time we approach Scripture it should be in a prayerful manner. The advantage we have as Christians is the fact that we have the Holy Spirit indwelling us. The Holy Spirit illuminates God's Word in our life and helps us understand and apply it to our life. But we have to cry out for that understanding.

## **WHY IS PRAYER SO IMPORTANT DURING PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY TIME? DO YOU ACTIVELY FOCUS ON PRAYER WHILE READING GOD'S WORD?**

**Proverbs 2:4:** If you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures

The writer encourages the reader to seek wisdom **like silver and search for it like hidden treasures**. If I came to you today and told you that \$1,000,000 was hidden somewhere in your house, and that you could keep all of it tax free, how earnestly would you start looking for it? If I knew there was a million dollars in my house, I wouldn't stop looking for it until I found it. What we find in the Bible is of far greater worth and significance than earthly treasure! The wisdom and salvation available in Scripture won't fade away or depreciate like everything else here on earth. The treasures in God's Word are eternal. We should have a greater drive to mine the pages of the Bible for wisdom than we would searching our house for treasure. Bible study is a treasure hunt for wisdom that will live beyond this world.

## **HOW DO YOU SEEK AFTER THE WISDOM IN GOD'S WORD? HOW HAS IT BEEN A TREASURE IN YOUR LIFE?**

**Proverbs 2:5-8** Then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints.

With any If...then statement, when IF is true, THEN must also be true. **Then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.** If we receive, listen, cry out, and seek God's wisdom, then we will find understanding and knowledge of God. Think for a moment of just how amazing that statement is. God, Creator of the Universe, Sustainer of all life, makes Himself known to us if we seek Him out. We have access to the wisdom and

knowledge of the One who created wisdom and knowledge itself! Just being able to know Him is an amazing blessing, but we gain so much more.

God **is a shield to those who walk in integrity**. When you walk in integrity, God provides protection. Can you imagine going into battle without a shield? Without a shield you are completely vulnerable to the attacks from the enemy. With a shield, you have protection from harm. God is our shield in life. As long as we are walking in integrity, God promises He is **guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints**. God is our protection from harm from the enemy. Satan can try his best to harm us, to tempt us, and to destroy us, but his efforts bounce off the saint following God like arrows off of a shield. God is with us in every step of everyday, guarding us and watching over us.

**HOW IS YOUR DAILY LIFE A BATTLE AGAINST THE ENEMY? CAN YOU THINK OF A TIME WHEN YOU WITNESSED GOD’S PROTECTION IN YOUR LIFE?**

## **PERSONAL STUDY**

We find a second THEN in Proverbs 2:9-15. For your personal study time this week, read these verses to discover what can be gained from God’s wisdom. Take a few moments to answer the following questions.

- **As you read the benefits of receiving wisdom in these verses, which benefits stand out most to you?**
- **In which of the areas are you strongest?**
- **In which of the areas are you weakest?**

# WEEK THREE

## PROVERBS 3:1-8

I remember a time when my nephew, Austin, was about 2 years old. Our families went on vacation together one year in the North Carolina mountains. Austin was at that age where he loved to jump off of things and into his dad's arms. Couch, counter, stairwell, didn't matter. As soon as his dad put his arms out, Austin would jump right into them. One morning we were ready to eat breakfast and the kids were upstairs. So I call them to breakfast and Austin comes to the top of the stairs. I was at the bottom and put my arms up to motion for him to come downstairs. You can probably guess what's about to happen! With a big grin on his face, Austin squatted down ready to jump. Realizing what I had just done, I went racing up the stairs and thankfully got to him just as he leapt. He had been so trained to trust his father that he ignored any possible danger and took a leap of faith.

If a 2 year old can so fully trust his human father, why is it so hard for us to fully trust our heavenly Father? This week we look at what trusting God looks like and how it changes us from the inside out.

**Proverbs 3:1-4:** My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for the length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.

The attention turns from the outward result of wisdom to the inner reception of wisdom. Again the writer urges his son to **not forget** his **teaching**, but this time he calls on him to **let your heart keep my commandments**. The call is to change what is inside the heart of his son, not just the behavior of his son. While behavioral change is good, inner change is what God seeks.

Have you ever taken a cup from the cabinet, assumed that it's clean, but found the inside still has something in it? Did you drink out of it anyway or clean the inside of the cup? In Matthew 23:25 Jesus says, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside you are full of greed and self-indulgence." Changing your behavior without changing your heart is like cleaning the outside of a cup and leaving filth on the inside. It may look great, but no one wants to drink from a dirty cup.

## **WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN APPEAR GODLY ON THE OUTSIDE BUT STILL HAVE A SINFUL HEART? TAKE A MOMENT IN PRAYER AND ASK GOD TO SHOW YOU AREAS OF YOUR HEART THAT NEED TO CHANGE.**

The writer goes on to say that if his son internalizes his commandments, that **length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you**. If you follow the commands of Scripture, are you guaranteed long life and peace? Obviously, we know that Godly people can die young or grow old, just as unbelievers. But by following God's commands we can avoid unnecessary suffering that comes as a consequence of unchecked sin. One of my favorite quotes is, "If you're gonna be dumb, you gotta be tough." There's some wisdom in that. If you're going to live a sinful life then you better be tough, because life surely will be tough. But following God's wisdom means we can avoid bringing destruction upon ourselves through sinful actions. In a way, we can add days to our lives by not participating in sin whose consequences can lead to early death.

## **WHAT ARE SOME CONSEQUENCES OF UNCHECKED SIN? HOW DOES FOLLOWING GOD'S COMMANDS PROTECT US FROM THOSE CONSEQUENCES?**

We are called to **let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you**. Look at those two qualities: Steadfast love and faithfulness. When was the last time you focused on being faithful and showing steadfast love? For some of us, New Year's Day is a time to make resolutions. We want to change areas of our lives. We want to worry less, lose weight, stop smoking, exercise more, or read our Bible more consistently. When was the last time your resolution included loving more consistently or growing in faithfulness? Our outward behaviors are driven by our inward focus. If you focus on growing in these areas, if **you bind them around your neck and write them on the tablet of your heart**, then Godly behavior will follow.

By growing in steadfast love and faithfulness, **you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man**. Why do we want to find favor and success in the sight of God and man? In Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus, when asked which is the greatest commandment in the law, answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." Our greatest command is to love God with everything we have and to love our fellow man as we love ourselves. We seek to find favor and good success in the sight of God and man in order

to fulfill our greatest command. In these verse, God urges us to do so by growing in steadfast love and faithfulness.

## **ARE YOU KNOWN FOR YOUR STEADFAST LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS? IN WHAT WAYS CAN YOU GROW IN THESE AREAS TODAY?**

**Proverbs 3:5-8:** Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

The inward focus continues on to trust, wisdom, and understanding. This is where we begin to change our thinking and decision making. We are called to **trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding**. Why is this difficult for us to do? If your decision process is like mine, then you tend to lean on your own experiences to guide your decision in new situations. If you tried something and failed, then you do it differently. If you tried something and succeeded, then you try to repeat that success. The problem is that every situation is different. Previous success doesn't guarantee repeated success. Previous failure doesn't guarantee repeated failure. When life is so uncertain, we must look to the One Certainty we have: God. We must look up from our circumstances and place our attention and trust fully on God. If we do so, if **in all your ways** you **acknowledge Him**, then **he will make straight your paths**. We cannot straighten our own paths. Instead, we must make every decision with God in mind. By doing so, we acknowledge Him in all our ways.

## **THINK OF A TIME WHERE YOU FULLY TRUSTED IN GOD. WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME? THINK OF A TIME WHEN YOU FULLY TRUSTED YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING. WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME?**

The writer continues to warn the reader to **be not wise in your own eyes**. Have you ever known someone who thinks they are the smartest person in every room they step foot in? Or are you that person? The problem with being wise in your own eyes is that the bar doesn't have to be set very high. You think you're wise because you set your own standard of wisdom. God's wisdom is far greater a standard than any we could set. Before God, no one is wise. Instead, we're called to **fear the Lord and turn away from evil**. Fearing the Lord is recognizing who God is and who we are in relation to Him. There's a reason why every account in the Bible of a man encountering God in heaven includes that man falling before God in fear. When we truly understand who God is and who we are before Him, we understand the wisest thing to do is fall

before Him in fear and worship. Our lives should live that out. Everyday we must recognize our place before God and understand that His word is true. He is wise, we are not, therefore we must trust in Him in all our decisions. To do otherwise is folly.

He notes that this fear of the Lord and turning from evil is **healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones**. There's something incredibly healing and refreshing about giving full control to God. We receive the healing and refreshing by recognizing that we are inadequate. By trying to navigate this world in our own wisdom and our own strength, we are carrying a great burden we were never meant to carry. When we admit that God is sufficient and we are not, that burden is lifted and we can find rest. Jesus speaks of this in Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

## **WHAT BURDENS DO YOU UNNECESSARILY CARRY? HOW CAN YOU LET GO OF THOSE BURDENS AND FIND REST IN GOD?**

### **PERSONAL STUDY**

Take a few moments to read Proverbs 3:21-32. As you read, take note of each time Scripture says, "Do not" and answer the following questions.

- **Which "Do not" do you struggle with?**
- **How does each "Do not" statement relate to an inward heart issue?**
- **How can you take each negative "Do not" statement and turn it into a positive heart command?**

# WEEK FOUR

## PROVERBS 4:1-19

Isn't it funny how our perception of our parents changes as we get older? As children, we trust every word of our parents, believing them to be the ultimate authority on every subject. Then the teenage years hit. Something happens to our brains and we no longer value our parents' words. We come to believe that we are the ultimate authority on every subject. Thankfully, adolescence ends, our brains return to normal, and we can look back at the wisdom of our parents and truly appreciate what they taught us.

Chapter 4 is a father's instructions to his son. The father begins by recalling the wise instructions of his own father. In turn, he passes on his wisdom to his son. In our lives we have those that pour wisdom into our lives and those into whose lives we pour our wisdom. This is the basic discipleship formula. One person discipled another, who then discipled another. As we look at these verses, consider these two questions:

### WHO DISCIPLED YOU? WHO ARE YOU DISCIPLING?

**Proverbs 4:1-8:** Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight, for I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching. When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother, he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight. Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her."

The father begins by recalling a time **when I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother, he taught me.** We are not born into wisdom. Wisdom must be taught and passed on with each generation. One way to see how God has worked in our lives is to look back at those who taught us about Him. Each person that took the time to teach you about God and His Word, whether it be a parent, teacher, pastor, or friend, is a gift from God sent to help you in your spiritual journey. Looking back to his own parents, the father is also showing that the wisdom he is passing on to his sons is enduring. We can judge wisdom to be from God if it is wisdom that endures.

## **WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON YOUR PARENTS TAUGHT YOU? WHAT'S THE GREATEST NUGGET OF WISDOM YOU'VE RECEIVED FROM A GODLY MENTOR?**

The father moves on to urge his sons to **not forsake her** (wisdom), **and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you**. Wisdom keeps us from making dumb mistakes. God's wisdom keeps us from making eternally dumb mistakes. If we treasure His wisdom and pursue understanding through His Word, then we can recognize the traps of sin in our lives. God's wisdom protects and guards us from the sinful traps of this world.

**Proverbs 4:10-13:** Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many. I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness. When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble. Keep hold of instruction, do not let go; guard her, for she is your life.

After the father speaks of his own father's instruction, he moves on to his instruction to his son. He urges the son to **accept my words**. As a child you may have accepted your parents words without questioning, but as you grew older you may have become more skeptical of their wisdom. We can be the same way with God when reading the Bible. We won't grow in wisdom if we don't accept the words of the Bible. If you can't accept what God says in the Bible, how then will you accept His words when they conflict with your life? If you can't accept Scripture, how can God have power to transform your life? We must approach the Bible ready to accept its words as greater wisdom than our own thoughts. Only then can we truly grow in Godly wisdom.

## **WHAT IS THE HARDEST TEACHING OF SCRIPTURE FOR YOU TO ACCEPT? WHAT TEACHINGS OF SCRIPTURE MAY BE HARD FOR OTHERS TO ACCEPT?**

He reminds the son that he has **taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness**. The father has set the son on the right path of life. The choice of which path to take in life is a crucial decision. Knowing where you want to go is one thing, but the route you choose to get there is critical. Here in the middle of summer families are planning vacations. Knowing what destination you're going to is one thing, but knowing how to get there is perhaps even more important. Without the right route mapped out, you'll be lost. We can trust that God has led us in the path of uprightness, we simply must follow it.

**When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble.** The father had set the son on the right path. The son only needed to continue down



that path of uprightness and his journey would be smoother than if he was making his own way. He has the freedom to run without being tripped up. God's path in our lives doesn't guarantee our journey will be without interruptions and pain, but his path is the best way to navigate our lives. Going our own way guarantees struggle and pain, God's way keeps us from unnecessary suffering.

## **IN YOUR LIFE, WHEN HAVE YOU FELT GOD LEADING YOUR PATH AND FOLLOWED HIM? WHAT WAS THAT JOURNEY LIKE?**

**Proverbs 4:14-19:** Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on. For they cannot sleep unless that have done wrong; they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble. For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble.

While the father has made the right path known to the son, he warns the son against the wrong path. He urges him to **not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil**. Notice that the son is free to choose: take the path of uprightness or the path of the wicked. The son must make the choice. We face the same choice every day. We are on a life long journey. Look back to our vacation illustration: What if you had driven for 8 hours, the right way, and were close to the beach, but then a few miles from the sand you get on an onramp to an interstate heading the wrong way? The 8 hour drive will all be in vain unless you continue in the right direction. In the same way, we can live our lives in uprightness, but it only takes one wrong decision to derail our lives. One of my favorite quotes is "We're all just one decision away from stupid." Honestly, we're all just one decision away from destroying our lives.

## **IN YOUR LIFE, WHEN HAVE YOU CHOSEN TO STEP OFF THE RIGHT PATH AND FOLLOW THE PATH OF THE WICKED? WHAT WAS THAT JOURNEY LIKE?**

For this reason, the father, speaking of the wicked path, tells his sons to **avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on**. The ways of the wicked are so destructive that we should completely avoid them. We are to have nothing to do with evil things. Paul says it best in Romans 16:19, "I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil." If evil and sinful ways have a path in your life, you must walk away from it. Is sin bombarding your life through the shows you watch? The articles you read? The music you listen to? The

people you associate with? If sin and evil have pathways in your life, then temptation is always a step away. When we are trying to walk the path of uprightness, having another path readily accessible will only make it easier to get out of step with God. The more familiar you become with the right ways of God, the easier it is to recognize the evil ways of the world. But recognizing isn't enough, we must be willing to turn away from those ways daily.

**TAKE A MOMENT IN PRAYER AND ASK GOD TO SHOW YOU PATHWAYS OF EVIL YOU'VE ALLOWED IN YOUR LIFE. ASK FOR THE DISCERNMENT TO RECOGNIZE THOSE PATHS AND THE STRENGTH TO TURN FROM THEM.**

How do you recognize the path of the righteous versus the path of the wicked? **The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.** The path of the righteous is a path of unashamed transparency. What do I mean by that? Basically, if you are walking the path of righteousness, then you would not be ashamed for anyone to witness what you are doing. The path is bright, everything is illuminated, nothing is hidden. When we are walking in step with God, then there is nothing to be ashamed of. Think of Adam and Eve. They walked with God without shame...and they were naked! They were in step with Him. It was only when they walked in sin that they tried to cover their nakedness in fear and shame.

In Luke 8:17, Jesus says, "For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light." All of our acts will be shown in the light. Those who walk the path of righteousness have no fear for that day, for they know their acts are pleasing to God. It's those who have walked in darkness, who hide their acts that truly fear that day.

**ARE THERE BEHAVIORS IN YOUR DAILY LIFE THAT ARE SHAMEFUL? WHAT CAN YOU DO TO CHANGE THEM INTO RIGHTEOUS BEHAVIORS?**

**PERSONAL STUDY**

This week, read Proverbs 4:20-27 and consider the following questions.

- **Notice how the writer lists parts of the body in these verses. What is the call to action for each part?**
- **Which of the calls to action do you need to improve on?**
- **Each day this week focus on one part of the body and how you can improve on the principle attached to that part in these verses.**