

What do you love?

What do you prize?

What matters most to you?

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

One good way to find out what matters most to you,
is to ask the question, what gets your goat?

If I wanted to get you riled up, what should I do?

Say something bad about your favorite sports hero or politician?

Try to undermine your authority in the home?

Tell a joke about homeschool moms?

What are you sensitive about?

That will reveal a great deal about you!

Proverbs 1-9 provides the introduction to the book of Proverbs.

If you learn wisdom from Proverbs 1-9,

then you will be able to understand Proverbs 10-31.

The basic structure of Proverbs 1-9 is oriented around the repeated phrase “my son,”
as the father sets forth the two ways—

the way of life and the way of death;

the path of wisdom and the path of folly.

In Proverbs 2-4 we are exhorted to find wisdom in 7 lectures.

In Proverbs 5-7 we will be warned against the dangers of folly in 4 lectures.

Proverbs 1-9 uses two main symbols of folly:

the devious men who promise easy money,

and the wayward woman who promises easy sex.

And likewise, Proverbs 1-9 uses two images of wisdom:

the value of wisdom whose gain is greater than all the treasures of earth;

and the delight of wisdom whose joys and glories surpass all the supposed “joys”
that folly can offer.

Chapter 4 summarizes all that the father has said before.

These three speeches sum up the essence of biblical wisdom.

This is the basic stuff that you want to teach your children.

1. What Do You Value? Get Wisdom!! (v1-9)

*Hear, O sons, a father's instruction,
and be attentive, that you may gain^[a] insight,
2 for I give you good precepts;
do not forsake my teaching.
3 When I was a son with my father,
tender, the only one in the sight of my mother,
4 he taught me and said to me,
“Let your heart hold fast my words;
keep my commandments, and live.
5 Get wisdom; get insight;
do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.
6 Do not forsake her, and she will keep you;
love her, and she will guard you.
7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom,
and whatever you get, get insight.
8 Prize her highly, and she will exalt you;
she will honor you if you embrace her.
9 She will place on your head a graceful garland;
she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.”*

In chapter four, the father starts by explaining where he learned wisdom.

This is the teaching that the grandfather taught the father.

And now, it is what the father teaches his sons.

This is tradition at its best.

Tradition is inevitable.

Your parents taught you—both by word and deed.

And you have been shaped by your parents

(sometimes in ways you would rather not admit!)

Many of you had parents that taught you wisely and well.

And now you are teaching those lessons to your children.

But many of you had parents who embraced folly's path.

How do you know what to teach your children?

Look back at the tradition of your parents.

If you would be a wise parent,

then you need to break the bad cycles and continue the good ones.

Here the father quotes the grandfather:

“He taught me”—he catechized me in wisdom's ways—
and showed me the way of life.

Catechesis is important!

Training – teaching – instruction matters!

If you just “hope that your kids ‘get’ it” –

then you are handing over their catechesis to *other voices!*

Someone will teach your children the way that they will walk.

Will you teach them to prize *wisdom?*

Notice the plural in verse 1 – “O sons.”

There are only a few uses of “sons” (plural).

Normally the father speaks to the “son” singular.

But at certain key junctures, the father speaks to his *sons*.

(Here – chapter 5, verse 7, and chapter 7, verse 24).

These three uses of the plural show us that this teaching is not merely for the One.

It’s not just the king – not just the “special people” – who need this teaching.

We all need wisdom!

The grandfather portrays wisdom as a bride to be loved,
and as a patroness who rewards her lover.

The ESV translates this as “get wisdom” –
but the word “get” is often translated “buy.”

In the ancient world, if you wanted a good wife, you would have pay for her.

The groom and his family was expected to provide a handsome dowry.

And the grandfather teaches that his son should be willing to part with anything
in order to marry wisdom.

Both in verse 5 and in verse 7 he insists “get wisdom!”

But together with this economic angle, there is also the erotic angle:

“Do not forsake her” “Love her” (v6)

“Prize her highly” “Embrace her” (v8)

Because the beginning of wisdom is this:

get wisdom!

Because Lady Wisdom is a wife who well repays the investment!

Because if you do not forsake her, she will keep you.

If you love her, she will guard you (v6)

In 2:8, 11 we heard that wisdom guards the paths of justice
and watches over (or keeps) the way of God’s saints.

And so here, the grandfather says:

Prize her highly (or, it could be translated, caress or cherish her), and she will exalt you.
She will honor you if you embrace her.

And all this comes to its climax in verse 9 where wisdom crowns you.

This is not a royal or priestly crown, but the crown of honor, beauty and authority.
(this is where the custom of the bride and groom being “crowned” comes from)

If you marry wisdom and embrace her, love her, and remain faithful to her,
then she will guard you, watch over you, honor you, exalt you, and crown you.

In case you haven't figured it out yet, **YOU WANT WISDOM!!**
Whatever we esteem and love will honor and exalt us.

Whose honor do you seek?
Whose voice matters to you?

What does Wisdom think of you?

All that is what your grandfather taught me.

This is what I have learned from my mentor.
And so now I am teaching this to *you*.

2. Where Are You Walking? The Two Ways (v10-19)

- ¹⁰ *Hear, my son, and accept my words,
that the years of your life may be many.*
- ¹¹ *I have taught you the way of wisdom;
I have led you in the paths of uprightness.*
- ¹² *When you walk, your step will not be hampered,
and if you run, you will not stumble.*
- ¹³ *Keep hold of instruction; do not let go;
guard her, for she is your life.*
- ¹⁴ *Do not enter the path of the wicked,
and do not walk in the way of the evil.*
- ¹⁵ *Avoid it; do not go on it;
turn away from it and pass on.*
- ¹⁶ *For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong;
they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble.*
- ¹⁷ *For they eat the bread of wickedness
and drink the wine of violence.*
- ¹⁸ *But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,
which shines brighter and brighter until full day.*
- ¹⁹ *The way of the wicked is like deep darkness;
they do not know over what they stumble.*

The theme of the central section of our passage is “walking”
The nouns, “way, tracks, steps, paths” occur 7 times in 9 verses.
The verbs, “lead, walk, run, stumble, stop, enter, step, go, turn, pass on” occur 11 times.

Indeed the language of “stumbling” unifies the three parts of the poem.
Verses 11-13 set forth the way of wisdom,
with the promise that the wise may run and “not stumble” (v12)
Verses 14-17 set forth the way of the wicked,
who cannot sleep “unless they have made someone stumble.” (v16)
And verses 18-19 provide a final contrast,
in which the wicked “do not know over what they stumble.” (v19)

In verses 11-13 we hear about the way of wisdom.
Nowadays we like to say that the journey is as important as the destination.
That is true, the father says,
but only if you are on the right path!

Because when you walk in the path of wisdom, “your step will not be hampered,
and if you run you will not stumble.”

And the way you learn to take the right path is by learning wisdom.
And the father declares that he has instructed us in the way of wisdom.
He has led us in the right path.

Wisdom is not an intellectual exercise,
it is a practical lifestyle.
It is not just about the way you think,
it is about the way you live—(which will include your thoughts, of course).

But the father rightly understands that our habits and patterns *shape us*.
It’s part of why I earnestly desire to keep preaching two sermons a week.

We are shaped by the rhythms and patterns of our *habits*.
For twenty-five years (since before I came to MCPC)
we have maintained the pattern of morning and evening worship.
If I preached the same sermon morning and evening,
who would participate twice on Sunday?

In the midst of chaos and tumult – let us look for ways to maintain what we can
of the *good habits* –
and let us take the opportunity to prune away what we can
of our *bad habits!*

Notice in verse 13 that the father says to guard wisdom.

[the feminine ending on “guard her” indicates that it is not “instruction”
(a masculine noun) but wisdom that is in view]

In verse 6 we were told that wisdom would guard us.

What does it mean to ‘guard’ wisdom?

The context is clear—you are holding on to instruction—

“Don’t let go!”

Hold on—“don’t leave the path!”

But if you hold fast to wisdom, you discover that she is your life.

The way of wisdom is your life.

Hmmm. Where have you heard this before?

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.”

And Paul said, “when Christ, who is your life, appears, you also will appear with him in glory.”

And Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God.

In verses 14-17 the father warns his son against the path of the wicked.

The language of these verses suggests that the way of the evil
is a perversion of that which was created to be good.

Verse 16: sleep is supposed to be a time of peace,
the daily refreshing of body and soul.

But for the wicked, “they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong;
they are robbed of sleep until they have made someone stumble.”

Wickedness is addictive.

Folly takes root in your soul and deprives you of sleep.

Verse 17 uses the language of bread and wine—
which God created as good gifts to man—
and says that for the wicked, their food is the bread of wickedness,
Their drink is the wine of violence.

They are sustained by their wickedness,
nourished by their evil ways.

“Wickedness has become their necessary nutrient.” [Waltke, 291]

Sleep and food and wine.

The most basic aspects of life are perverted in the way of the wicked.

The central part of chapter 4 closes in verses 18-19 with a contrast between the two ways:

*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.

The analysis of the two ways concludes by pointing out that the path of the righteous is well lit.

In the clarity of God's word and wisdom,
all of life is illuminated.
But Proverbs seems to understand as well that this light
is still growing brighter and brighter, clearer and clearer every day.
There is a sense of progressive revelation—
that God makes his ways known more and more until the full revelation of Christ.
But in all generations there is a clear distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

The righteous can see in the light of dawn,
while the wicked are plunged in deep darkness.

The blindness of the wicked is as obvious as it selective!
After all, they see perfectly well in *some ways*.

If your only tool is a hammer, then every problem is a nail.
I kind of felt that way last summer.

In our home rehab project, we did a *lot* of demolition —
tearing out all sorts of things!
And my favorite tool was a massive red crowbar,
that I nicknamed the *red menace*.
If I had a job to do, I would grab the red menace and off I'd go!

Then came the day when I needed a screwdriver...
and the Red Menace wasn't all that useful!

The wicked *think* that they see clearly —
so they will take their crowbar and try to yank out the screw...

Those with wisdom will put the crowbar down and go find a screwdriver!

The father concludes with a poem that reaches every part of the human being.
Listen for all of the parts:

3. Every Part Matters! Eyes, Mouth, Heart, Feet... (v20-27)

²⁰ My son, be attentive to my words;
incline your **ear** to my sayings.

²¹ Let them not escape from your **sight**;
keep them within your **heart**.

²² For they are **life** to those who find them,
and healing to all their^[b] **flesh**.

²³ Keep your **heart** with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life.

²⁴ Put away from you crooked **speech**,

*and put devious **talk** far from you.*
²⁵ *Let your **eyes** look directly forward,
and your **gaze** be straight before you.*
²⁶ *Ponder^[c] the path of your **feet**;
then all your ways will be sure.*
²⁷ *Do not swerve to the right or to the left;
turn your **foot** away from evil.*

Verses 20-27 connect the whole person.

Verses 20-21 start with how wisdom enters (ear/eye)
residing in the heart (21b-23)

–the Father’s words are life-giving.

–and as Jesus says in John 8:51,

“if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”

It is not simply a matter of external conformity – going through the motions!

It is an internal conformity that must come first.

We must be shaped by the word.

Only then, as we find the life-giving word dwelling in our heart–

and notice the active words: “let them not escape from your sight;”

“keep them within your heart”

You are to guard these saying carefully–

it almost sounds like wisdom is trying to escape!

(though the reality is that *we* are trying to escape from wisdom!)

But you must be diligent and keep your guard up–

because, as verse 23 points out,

the heart is the source of life–

“from it flow the springs of life”

Notice the movement from wisdom guarding you in verse 6

to guarding wisdom in verse 13,

to guarding yourself in verse 23.

Do not forsake wisdom and she will guard you.

But guard her, for she is your life!

Guard your heart with all vigilance.

Those three statements well summarize the pattern of life that we are called to walk.

Who’s guarding who?!

It makes sense if you think about it.

Think about the marriage imagery.

If you are faithful in pursuing your wife – loving your wife – caring for her –
then she will protect you.

(On the other hand, if you forsake her – then she won't be there for you either!)

If that is true in marriage, *how much more* is it true of wisdom!

If you say “hey, I know what I'm doing – I don't need wisdom!”
then don't be surprised when your folly undermines you!

And that's why “guard your heart” matters!

The heart is deceitful above all things.

It's easy to think that I don't struggle with “big sins” – I just have little sins of the heart!

I don't steal people's stuff – I just covet it!

I don't sleep around – I just look at half-naked women online.

The Father says to his Son that everything starts in the heart!

Guard your heart – keep your heart with all vigilance –
for from it flow the springs of life.

The glory of our Lord Jesus Christ is that his heart is a well-guarded spring.

He is the faithful son,

and he is also the source of life for us!

John 8:38,

“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said,

‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

The river of life flows from the heart of Jesus to the hearts of his people.

We guard our hearts because we have been united to his pure and holy heart!

And everything else flows from the heart:

Verses 24-27 then focus on the outward expression of wisdom

the mouth in verse 24

the eyes in verse 25

and the feet in verses 26-27

Notice all the “sense” language (listen/sight/heart/mouth/lips/eyes/gaze)

keep your eyes peeled and your ears to the ground

guard your heart and your lips

and walk in the good way

If you guard your heart, then you will put away crooked speech.

We need to speak *straight*.

Don't be devious – don't be crooked or twisted in your words.

Paul admonishes us to avoid “foolish talk” or “coarse jesting.”

That's rooted here.
Don't use language that is twisted and perverted from the truth.

Likewise, the eyes (verse 25) –
Let your eyes be straight.
Be *honest* with the use of your eyes.

Don't use them selfishly – use them to *love others*.

How do you use your eyes to love?
When that child misbehaves in the grocery store –
 don't give a reproving glance at the frantic mother –
 use your eyes (and perhaps your voice!) to love!
Smile and encourage!

As the weather warms up – and people are wearing less clothing –
discipline your eyes to *love* –
 that person – and others around you.
Don't "sneak" peeks – that's just selfish –
Look straight! (like you should talk straight!)

And in the same way verses 26-27 say that we should *walk straight*.
Make straight paths for your feet – do not swerve when you are walking.

The father is not talking about what to do when you are walking in a forest.
He is saying that on the path of life, be a person who is characterized by straight-dealing.
Don't be crooked – don't be bent.

Walk with Jesus.
He is the path!