

Proverbs – Live Well

Sermon 2 – Proverbs 4 - Take a Step Towards Life

Introduction

Proverbs Chapter 4. I'm going to read it, in its entirety. These are God's words to you. And as such they will be the most powerful words I speak in this sermon. Listen in.

Listen, sons, to a father's discipline,
and pay attention so that you may gain understanding,
2 for I am giving you good instruction.
Don't abandon my teaching.
3 When I was a son with my father,
tender and precious to my mother,
4 he taught me and said,
"Your heart must hold on to my words.
Keep my commands and live.
5 Get wisdom, get understanding;
don't forget or turn away from the words from my mouth.
6 Don't abandon wisdom, and she will watch over you;
love her, and she will guard you.
7 Wisdom is supreme — so get wisdom.
And whatever else you get, get understanding.
8 Cherish her, and she will exalt you;
if you embrace her, she will honor you.
9 She will place a garland of favor on your head;
she will give you a crown of beauty."

TWO WAYS OF LIFE

10 Listen, my son. Accept my words,
and you will live many years.

11 I am teaching you the way of wisdom;
I am guiding you on straight paths.
12 When you walk, your steps will not be hindered;
when you run, you will not stumble.
13 Hold on to instruction; don't let go.
Guard it, for it is your life.
14 Keep off the path of the wicked;
don't proceed on the way of evil ones.
15 Avoid it; don't travel on it.
Turn away from it, and pass it by.
16 For they can't sleep
unless they have done what is evil;
they are robbed of sleep
unless they make someone stumble.
17 They eat the bread of wickedness
and drink the wine of violence.
18 The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,
shining brighter and brighter until midday.
19 But the way of the wicked is like the darkest gloom;
they don't know what makes them stumble.

THE STRAIGHT PATH

20 My son, pay attention to my words;
listen closely to my sayings.
21 Don't lose sight of them;
keep them within your heart.
22 For they are life to those who find them,
and health to one's whole body.
23 Guard your heart above all else,
for it is the source of life.
24 Don't let your mouth speak dishonestly,

and don't let your lips talk deviously.
25 Let your eyes look forward;
fix your gaze straight ahead.
26 Carefully consider the path for your feet,
and all your ways will be established.
27 Don't turn to the right or to the left;
keep your feet away from evil. -- Proverbs 4:1-27 (CSB)

LET ME TELL YOU WHERE WE ARE GOING TODAY WITH THIS.

In preaching you are taught to think of the sermon like a flight. There's the take off, the flight, and the landing. Well, today I'm just going to land the plan here at the start. Our destination is a way of life that is motivated by the Grace of God, That is championing the glory of God, and that is walking in the wisdom of God. Grace motivated God glorifying Wisdom.

Think about what I just read to you. Proverbs 4 is a father putting his arm around his son and saying...here is the path of life. I want this for you. I want you to live well. And like I said last week this is God's letter to us. And you gotta hear God your father saying I want you to live well in the creation I've made for you.

And if you live according to my word, you will get a taste, just a taste, of the fullness of life that you will have in eternity with him.

But here's why I'm landing the plane. The true fulfillment of the full life...is Only found in Jesus. Jesus said in John 10.10 that he came that we might have life and have it abundantly.

Proverbs, especially chapter 4, has plenty of do's and don'ts. Warnings and instructions. But it is possible to hear all of

them, to apply them to your life...AND MISS GOD!

*And that's big today because you could think...just give me the wisdom, I'll apply it and try to live well on my own. But the beginning of all wisdom is the fear of the Lord. True life is only possible when you are in right relationship with God. THAT's why you have to see Proverbs 4 through the lens of the gospel.

Jesus says COME to me and I will give you rest. Abide in me and then you will bear fruit. Romans calls the salvation of God a GIFT you receive. Ephesians says by GRACE, not by works, you have been saved. God says every one of us can have abundant life. IN FULL. We don't deserve it, but God says that in Christ...we can have it. Now. Today.

The gospel is what God has done for us in Christ. The gospel isn't about what we should or shouldn't do. It's about what God has done. And if you come to Proverbs just looking for dos and don'ts you are missing the big point. You need the do's & don't's...the wisdom of God...but you need to read it through the heart of God. Don't come here and just get good advice and MISS Jesus!

Regardless of what you've done, You can have the grace of Christ RIGHT NOW. Every one of us TODAY has a deep sense of sin. of unworthiness. Of how we don't measure up. We carry the secret sins that nobody else knows about and we feel unworthy and Jesus looks at us and says I KNOW. I KNOW AND I LOVE YOU. Look at me, listen to me, and LIVE AGAIN.

One of my favorite sermons of all time is the expulsive power of a new affection by Thomas Chalmers. He said, my paraphrasing, you can preach a sermon where you tell people how futile their sin is, how it leads to death, how it will leave them empty...and they will nod their heads in agreement...and they will never change! Just seeing how wrong we are doesn't change us. We change when we see something better for us. And that something better is Christ! Jesus says LOOK AT ME...and LIVE. Turn away from your sin, but when you do...turn TO ME. AND I WILL GIVE YOU LIFE. I am the WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE. Give yourself to me...and THEN you will change. You will be motivated by Grace.

When we see the gospel saying Jesus pours out his life so WE CAN TRULY LIVE...when you base your life on that...you stop dying so much. You finally start living. And Proverbs 4 is all about that life. The path of life. So if you want LIFE, fix your eyes on the path of Life God is leading you down in to proverbs 4 today.

Proverbs 4 breaks up into 3 sections pretty cleanly. Getting on the path of life, staying on the path, and the thing that will keep you from getting lost.

Getting on the path of life (vv 1-9)

Look at vv 3-4.

3 When I was a son with my father,
tender and precious to my mother,
4 he taught me and said,
"Your heart must hold on to my words."

Keep my commands and live.

Most of the time the author just talks father to son. But here he is saying...let me bring My father's voice in here. This is the classic "when I was your age." But he follows not with what HE did right as a young man but what his father did right. And Solomon realizes its his responsibility to pass down this wisdom to the next generation. And I want us to consider for just a second that Proverbs is saying there is high value in the voices of those who have come before us.

That's Hebrews 13.7 – Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you, consider the outcome of their lives and imitate their faith.

Hebrews 11 has this long list, recounting israel's history and says all of these heroes acted by faith...remember them...

- By Faith Abel was approved righteous by God
- By faith Noah built an ark
- By faith Abraham set out for the promised land
- By faith Sarah received power to conceive in old age
- By faith Isaac blessed Jacob
- By faith Joseph foretold of the exodus
- By faith Moses led the Passover, the exodus, and crossed the red sea
- By faith the walls of Jericho fell
- By faith Gideon, By faith Barak, By faith Samson, By faith David, by faith Samuel, and by faith so many the author runs out of room and he says...

Hebrews 12.1 – THEREFORE...because we have such a great CLOUD of witnesses...and church we have all of those PLUS 2000 years of Christ followers who have come since...

- LET us run the race with endurance FIXING OUR EYES ON Jesus. The author and perfecter of our faith.

They are all saying

“Jesus DID NOT FAIL US! He will NOT FAIL YOU!” Set your heart on the only prize that cannot fail. GET wisdom. Get insight. Are you convinced of this yet? Do you have the urgency of getting wisdom?

How you get going – decide to take a step down the path of life. Trust that God is faithful.

7 Wisdom is supreme — so get wisdom. And whatever else you get, get understanding.

NIV verse 7 – “though it costs you all you have.” It will cost you your pre-conceived notions about life. It will give you life. You have a choice. Culture has a different wisdom. A different way to really LIVE.

Culture – Be young, thin, sexually active, rich, and opinionated. Then you’ll live the good life - But name one that has come out on the other side and been satisfied.

Compare that to the millions who have hurled themselves at the feet of Jesus and found LIFE. With no regret. You and I, here RIGHT NOW today...we have a CHOICE – between the proven way of Christ and the defunct way of this age. Whichever way you choose, it will cost you all you have. One will give you everything you need though. That’s Christ. He says come to me and find true life.

Jim Elliot, one among those great cloud of witnesses who was martyred for his faith said he is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

Staying on the path of life (vv 10-19)

There is something Solomon is saying to his son in chapter 4 that is so simple, so obvious, but so easy to miss. The decisions you are making right now...are taking you somewhere. They are taking you down A path. That path is leading you somewhere.

11 I am teaching you the way of wisdom; I am guiding you on straight paths.

12 When you walk, your steps will not be hindered; when you run, you will not stumble...

14 Keep off the path of the wicked; don’t proceed on the way of evil ones.

At the end of chapter 4 he’s going to circle back to this right here and say

26 Carefully consider the path for your feet, and all your ways will be established.

Basically son I want you to think about the steps you are taking. You are always walking down a path. And that path is leading you somewhere. It doesn’t matter whether you WANT to go where it is taking you, that’s where that path goes. And if you are on that path you will go where it leads.

- Ex: My family wants to go to Asheville. To see Biltmore house at Christmas. We get bundled up. We make reservations. We are ready for it... And we get up to

Hwy 74 and go EAST. We will not get to Asheville. In 2.5 hours we will be in Eastern North Carolina approaching the beach but not yet at the beach. And I don't know if any of ya'll are from rural eastern north Carolina...But it is not exactly destination vacation land. What if I pray about it? NOPE. Still in Swansboro. Because that's the path we were on. To borrow a line from Andy Stanley: **Our direction, not our intention, determines our destination.**

That makes total sense when it comes to traveling but for some reason we have a hard time seeing that when it applies to our lives. We find ourselves saying "How in the world did I get here?" Well, the decisions you made put you on a path that led you right where you are. "But I didn't *intend* to end up here." Well, it doesn't really matter what your intentions were. *DIRECTION, not intention, determines destination.* Examples I see regularly:

- you intend to marry a Christian man and have a solid family that grows up in the church learning the ways of God...but you are dating a guy who is not a Christian. Your direction, not your intention, will determine your destination. You won't magically arrive at healthy Christian family. You'll arrive at heart ache & slowly devalue the relationship with God you were made for.
- You want your kids to grow up close to you and you want them to want to remain close to you even when grown. Yet you spend 70 hours a week at work and they never see you.

- You want a close relationship with God BUT...you are more consumed by approval of others.
- You want your kids to respect you and value your input but you are cheating on their mom
- Guys you want to be a spiritual leader but you spend all your free time playing video games, sleeping in, never reading your bible, and refusing to commit to any meaningful involvement in church.
- You want community...But you keep yourself aloof...you complain and wait on friends to appear the way that best suits you...And you run away whenever community is the least bit uncomfortable. Your isolation is leading you to a destination...
- You want to be generous with your money – but you have no financial margin in your life, you don't budget your money, and your credit card keeps stacking up.
- You want to leave a legacy of discipleship but you spend all your time on golf and grandkids instead of discipling younger men & women. That path is TAKING YOU SOMEWHERE!

Direction, not intention, determines destination.

Ok that leads right to the last and I think most important thing that will keep you on the path of life so that you can arrive at your destination. **The thing that will keep you from getting lost.** You see it right in verse 23

23 Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life.

What does Guard your heart Mean?

The thing that keeps you from getting lost: The condition of your heart (vv.20-27)

The greatest obstacle to following the path of life is a heart that desires death. It is our wrong desires that make us take wrong steps that lead us to the land of darkness. That's everywhere in here. And the more you give your heart to those desires the more disorienting your journey will be.

19 But the way of the wicked is like the darkest gloom; they don't know what makes them stumble.

Their desires get so disordered that according to verse 16 they can't even sleep until they have done evil. They drink the wine of violence and eat the bread of wickedness. This is language of being totally overtaken by something. This is the end of the path of the wicked. You want something other than God...and you want it so bad it leads you to all kinds of awful decisions that then become a way of life. A way of life you can't do without and eventually you are dependent on the very thing destroying you.

That's such a stark contrast to the LIGHT of DAWN in verse 18 shining brighter and brighter until midday. Where you can see clearly and walk confidently.

Solomon is getting at the reality of the human condition here.

We all have desires. We were created with them. And every religion will tell you that you have to do something with them. You can put them in the drivers seat and follow your heart – After all, today is all you have. So live it up. That's secularism. You can see desires as evil and suppress them so you can achieve a state of detached enlightenment. Many eastern religions. The Bible says God created you with the capacity to desire. So desire is good. But the problem is, sin has corrupted

and disordered them. So ultimate desire, the desire for deepest fulfillment doesn't lead us to God as it was meant to, instead leads us to things that will consume us. These can often be good things. Marriage, career, reputation. But when they grab first place in our heart...they will become our source of life. We'll obsess over them. That's what sets our steps in the wrong direction.

Example: Marriage

- If you obsess over marriage...Either you'll never date anybody because you are so consumed by the idea of a perfect spouse that you will keep picking out flaws in each woman you meet. Or, you will date anybody...even people no good for you...because you just have to be in a relationship. For both, a disordered heart is sabotaging their life.
- So how do you “guard your heart?” You open your day in the gospel and keep it before you. If you are constantly aware you are a sinner, and constantly satisfied in the relational love supplied to you by Christ from God...you won't NEED dating or marriage. BUT, you will also be able to open yourself to the possibility of marriage because he or she is of course flawed. Love for God guards your heart against both disappointment and co-dependence.
- Others do this with career – You work crazy hours to kill yourself to get ahead so you can be known. OR, you refuse to take a job unless it is absolutely perfect for you. Both are trying to find identity in career. INSTEAD – You open your day in the gospel. You see that your approval is in Christ alone. Don't need to chase the praise of people. But you also see you are

created to glorify God in your work. And you can do that in most jobs. So you don't have to wait for the perfect job to get started doing something. Your heart will be guarded against disappointment seeping too deep and will be guarded against pride taking over.

Your heart is your source of life. Whatever is in there will direct your steps. Either into the path of darkness or into the light of the bright morning sun. And the path of the bright morning sun is the path of satisfaction in Christ that motivates you to obeying God with joy. **Grace motivated God glorifying wisdom.**

So how do we get our hearts right? This is why we read the Proverbs through the lens of the New Testament.

7 Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. - James 4:7-8

St. Augustine said it this way: Love Jesus and do whatever you want to do. Sounds dangerous. But...he was banking on a love for Jesus creating desires that will take steps down the path of life. So Get to know more of Jesus. Direct your heart and attention and time to him. You will never know God's will MORE than you know God's word.

You want to know what God's will is for your life? First let me ask you do you know his love for you? Are you drawing near to God? Because his will flows out of his love. The Christian Ethic at every turning point is a grace-motivated ethic. Remember

Drawing near starts with receiving Christ who is your life. Resting in his love. And then trusting him enough to walk his way. Follow his commands. Are you ready to say yes to him?

Here's the step I want you to take in light of Proverbs 4 & in light of this being grouplink week. We are going to call this the "Proverbs 2-step."

Step 1 - I want you to identify one specific thing in your life you know you need God's wisdom for. Step 2 - I want you to ask a trusted friend to help you come up with a step you can take to understand and follow God in that thing.

Transition to communion