

Embrace Wisdom

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[0 : 00] Hi, morning everyone. I'm going to be reading all of Proverbs chapter 4, if you could open your Bibles with me. I'm also reading from the ESB. Hear, O sons, a father's instruction. 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. Let my commandments, 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 honour you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a graceful garland. She will bestow on you a beautiful crown. 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 paths of uprightness. When you walk, your step will not be hampered. If you run, you will not stumble. Keep hold of instruction. Do not let go. Guard her for she is your life. Do not enter the path of the wicked and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it. Do not go on it. Turn away from it and pass on. For they cannot sleep unless they 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 righteous, is like the light of dawn, which shine brighter and brighter until full day. The way of the wicked is like deep darkness. They do not know over what they stumble. My son, be attentive to my words.

Incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight. Let them keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them and healing to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all vigilance. For from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you crooked speech and put devious talk far from you. Let your eyes look directly forward and your gaze be straight before you. Ponder the path of your feet. Then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left. Turn your foot away from evil.

[2 : 46] Let's pray as we begin. Dear Lord, thank you that we can come here today and hear from your word and hear about wisdom from you.

Lord, help me share your word clearly, faithfully. Remove distractions from me. Let there be no technical errors, Lord. And Lord, help everyone listening. Pay attention.

And Lord, all of us here, we need wisdom from you today. And so help us become wise. Not in our own eyes, but biblically wise today through what we see in your word.

We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. So, to begin, what are you passionate about? What have you embraced?

Maybe it's a hobby, an instrument, a sport or politics. When we see something as worthwhile, we naturally just go all in on it. For example, sports fans, Simon Bernard or Sam Jenkins, they can list off the strengths and weaknesses of nearly all the players in all the teams of the sports league.

[3 : 59] They've gone all in. Now, when you've gone all in on something you're passionate about, it starts affecting your lifestyle. What you talk about, who you spend time with, what you want to do in your spare time.

And finally, it can change your thoughts and emotions in little ways and big ways. For example, someone who is passionate about politics and has made it part of their lifestyle.

They will begin to think and react differently to things in the world and feel strongly about events and situations because they've embraced a certain type of politics.

It changes the way they think and feel. So, when we see something valuable, we embrace it passionately with everything that we've got. It begins to change our lifestyle and it shapes our heart.

What are you passionate about? What have you embraced? Now, how does that compare to your feelings about wisdom?

[5 : 06] Are you passionate about wisdom? Have you embraced it? Today, we'll see God wants us to embrace wisdom in an even stronger way than those other things we naturally embrace.

So, what is wisdom? Our society searches for wisdom in all the wrong places, which can cause us to be confused about what this wisdom is we should be embracing.

It can feel intangible. What is biblical wisdom? Is it just memorizing practical sayings which have a deep insight, but at the same time are not always true?

As Wilco reminded us last week, we need to keep at the forefront of our mind what the author says in chapter 1, verse 7. I'm going to read it again.

This is wisdom. Seeing him as supreme in our life and ordering all our life by our relationship with him.

[6 : 35] Now, we also need to know what this part of Proverbs is doing. Before Proverbs gets to the actual Proverbs, the two-line statements which start in chapter 10, it begins with the instructions from chapter 1, verse 8 to chapter 9, verse 18, which are made up of tense, longer speeches from a father and two discourses on lady wisdom.

Now, why are these in the book, the instructions at the beginning? Well, firstly, they help us understand and make proper use of the Proverbs when we get to them.

The speeches introduce different topics. Like today, one of the speeches talks about the path of righteousness, the way of wisdom. Now, when we get to the actual Proverbs in chapter 10, we see Proverbs like, In the path of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death.

The speech that we'll see today on the path of righteousness helps us understand the Proverbs about the path of righteousness. And it's the same with other topics. The speech on the heart today will help readers understand the Proverbs about the heart.

The second and primary function for this section of Proverbs is encouraging the reader to embrace wisdom, this fear of the Lord.

[7 : 59] Chapter 1, verse 7 shows two ways to live, the fear of the Lord or foolishness. These instructions are persuading the youth referred to in this book and us, the readers, to choose the way of wisdom.

So, as we come to our passage today, which features three of these speeches, know that the author is out to get you. He will be persuading you to embrace a life of wisdom, passionately, with everything that you've got.

He'll be pleading with you to embrace the way of wisdom as a defining lifestyle. And he wants you to embrace wisdom as a heart shaper. With that, let's get into the text.

So, we see in the first speech today, in verses 1 to 9, an encouragement to embrace wisdom passionately, with everything that we've got.

It starts off in verses 1 and 2 with the Father explaining how the Son should embrace wisdom and why he should. In verses 3 to 9, he then just elaborates on and illustrates exactly what he just said by showing this is the same thing his Father told him.

[9 : 09] So, first, how should we embrace wisdom? Is it simply intellectual ascent? Well, verse 1, we embrace it by listening attentively.

Verse 2, by not forsaking it. Verse 4, by holding it fast in our heart. And we'll look at what that means a little bit more in the third speech today. Verse 6, wisdom is personified as a lady.

We saw that last week. And we should not forsake her. We should love her. Verse 8, we should prize her. And that word prize could also mean caress or cuddle.

And we should embrace her. How should we go about embracing wisdom? Passionately, with everything that we've got. But why should we embrace wisdom with everything that we've got?

Because, verse 1, you will gain insight. Now, some translations translate insight as understanding or good judgment.

[10 : 13] If you embrace the fear of the Lord, you will be able to see things the way they really are. If you know who the true God is and what he says, you can make sense of life.

Why else should we embrace wisdom? Well, in verse 2, we see that these precepts are good. Then the grandfather elaborates on their goodness by saying they will give life.

Verse 4. In verse 6, when lady wisdom reappears, she is good because she will keep and guard you. Verse 8, she will exalt you and honour you, make you come to a high position in society.

Verse 9, she will give you a wreath and a crown, signifying that she will glorify you and make you beautiful. Verse 7 sums up this section well.

The beginning of wisdom is this. Get wisdom. And whatever you get, get insight. Insight is just another word to talk about wisdom.

[11:21] He's saying, wisdom is not inside of you, it's outside of you. And you need to grab it with everything that you've got above everything else because it's the most important thing worth getting.

I love what the King James Version puts. The King James Version says, with all thy getting, get understanding. With all thy getting. That's a lot of getting. Derek Kinner puts it this way. What it takes is not brains or opportunity, but decision. Do you want it? Come and get it. Friends, do we see wisdom this way?

Do we see its worth? How it's insight giving, life giving? Well, that is what it is. As we see its great value, we can't help but passionately embrace it with everything that we've got.

Now, this embracing is more than reading your Bible and praying, but not less. We see that it involves commandments, teachings, precepts. Embracing wisdom with all you've got is a posture, an attitude towards God.

[12:33] It means you'll receive from him his word and that you will hold on to it. Meditate, love, trust in it and apply it to your life in the world. Are you passionately embracing wisdom with all you've got?

So, wisdom is like a lady we need to embrace passionately. But is wisdom just a one-off event? How does it affect our day-to-day?

How does it affect our lifestyle? In the next speech in verses 10 to 19, we see it's like a way we need to walk. A lifestyle to be embraced.

And if we're not embracing the way of wisdom, we're walking in the way of evil. This speech is structured for the first four verses, from verses 10 to 13, calling the son to embrace the way of wisdom.

The next four verses feature the father exhorting the son to stay off the way of evil. In the end, we have two verses summarizing the choice between the way of wisdom and the way of evil.

[13:41] So, in verses 10 to 13, we see the way of wisdom. In verse 10, the father once again calls the son to accept wisdom, so that he might have long life.

In verses 11 to 12, he starts describing wisdom that he is taught and modeled as a way of wisdom. And it's not just a way of wisdom, but a path of uprightness.

Uprightness is straightforward living, both moral and practical. Wisdom is a lifestyle affecting the way we live.

And when we walk this path, verse 12, we are not hampered when we walk or stumble when we run. Picture language to show that the way of wisdom is the best way to live.

It doesn't have any hidden problems. You can trust this way. A path is a road which has come about because it's been walked before.

[14:44] We saw in the last speech that the son's father and grandfather had both walked the path, tried and tested. This is the way.

In verse 13, the father switches metaphors back to lady wisdom again, after showing how good the way of wisdom is and calls the son to embrace wisdom. Don't let her go, son.

Guard her. Why? Once again, she is your life. The way of wisdom is the supreme lifestyle. Now, the father has encouraged the son to embrace the way of wisdom, but then he shows how superior it is by contrasting it with its alternative lifestyle, the way of evil in verses 14 to 17.

He begins by emphatically imploring his son to stay off this path. Look at the imperatives, the commands the father uses in verses 14 and 15.

Do not enter the path of the wicked. Do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it. Do not go on it. Turn away from it. Pass on. The father is repeating the same thing six different ways to make it very clear.

[16:01] Stay off this path. What makes it evil and wicked? It shows life without the fear of the Lord. The people who are walking on it are seen in verses 16 and 17.

Verse 16. They are like addicts. They can't sleep until they have done wrong or pulled someone into their own. Verse 17.

They're so twisted their food is not bread and wine, but violence and wickedness. To do evil is more proper and natural to the wicked than to sleep, eat or drink.

The father is saying to his son, this is the alternative lifestyle to the way of wisdom. The choice is obvious. He then summarizes the two ways vividly in verses 18 and 19.

In verse 18, the way of wisdom is now the path of righteousness. And if you walk on it, you only have light to look forward to.

[17:08] God's wisdom, when accepted, is like light. You can see things the way they really are, which is helpful for the journey. Or verse 19. Walk on the way of wicked and you're already in deep darkness.

You have all these problems in your life, but you don't know what's actually causing them. Isn't that a good description for our world? Ray Altman summarizes the choice beautifully like this.

All who, by God's grace, follow the path of wisdom are already in the early morning of their lives. All who take the other path are already in the lengthening shadows of their afternoon.

Friends, what path are you on? Do you even know? What path do you want to be on? Because there's only two paths. And if you're not on the way of wisdom, you're on the way of evil.

And currently in deep darkness. So wisdom is the superior way, the superior lifestyle. But is it just an external thing?

[18:17] Is wisdom just something we do? In our next and final speech, in verses 20 to 27, we see the superior way of wisdom is not just a lifestyle we live, but something we embrace as a heart shaper.

Wisdom is not just practical advice for living. It can change us from the inside out and empowers us to live the lifestyle of wisdom. This section can be split up into two parts.

The first part from verses 20 to 22 explores how wisdom needs to be received down into the core of our being. To shape our heart. The second part in verses 23 to 27 looks at how our heart is shaped by wisdom is to be expressed as we keep to the way of wisdom.

So we begin this speech similar to the others. And the father employs receptive organs to show how wisdom should be drawn into the heart.

Verse 20. We need to attentively embrace wisdom with our ears. Verse 21. We need our eyes fixed on it. And we need to keep it within our heart.

[19:31] A similar command to what we saw back in verse 4. Now when the Bible talks about the heart, it's quite different from the way the world uses it today. Derek Kidner says in Proverbs, it most commonly stands for the mind, but it can go on to represent the emotions, the will, and the whole inner being.

Now in the Bible, our fundamental problem is our hearts. We are supposed to love God with our hearts, with all of our hearts. We're supposed to serve him from our hearts.

But the Bible says our heart is deceitful, sick, cold, dead. But verse 22, we see that when we embrace wisdom as a heart shaper, we experience life and healing.

Wisdom gets down to the heart of our problem, our hearts. Now based on the command to embrace wisdom down to the heart, the Father then in verses 23 to 27 explains how embracing God's wisdom into the heart will express itself and flow forth, not just in our hearts, but the way we act. And so we come to verse 23, which explains the concept. Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life.

[20:57] The Father is saying, you need to be very careful and guard what you do let into your heart. What you value and embrace, because this is what guides the way you live and act.

Jesus talks about this in Matthew 15 verses 19 when he says, For out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

Wisdom shaping our hearts will guard us against sin shaping the way we live. In verse 24, the Father begins to show how a heart shaped by wisdom will express itself.

He's saying, once you've dealt with your inner life, then put away crooked speech far from me. Our speech reveals our heart. Out of the heart the mouth speaks.

And so as someone who has wisdom shaping their hearts, let that reflect what you say. Wisdom in our hearts also expresses itself in what we look at and where we walk.

[22:04] Verses 25 and 26. The wise man keeps his eyes fixed on the way of wisdom, meaning he doesn't look at anything else.

He ponders, thinks about and weighs up where he's going to make sure he does not stray from the path and fall into evil. Verse 27. Once wisdom is in our hearts, shaping our thoughts and emotions, guarding us from foolishness, it radically changes the way we live.

And so as we get to the end of the passage, it brings forth the question. Have I embraced wisdom passionately with everything that I've got as the defining lifestyle and as a heart shaper?

Verse 23 gives us a diagnostic tool to ponder this. What is flowing from you? What is shaping your heart?

What does your speech show? What does what you look at show? What does your lifestyle reveal? What do you lose sleep over? Where do you want to go in life?

[23 : 19] What's your bread and wine? What does your passion reveal? What do you prize, love and value? What do you think will give you life and exalt you?

If I'm honest with myself, often the answers to these questions reveal that I'm not embracing God's wisdom. Why not?

Well, because I, we, don't see it as the beautiful thing to get above all else. Instead, we often think that the way of evil, not the way of wisdom is what leads to a good life.

We self-deceived into thinking the way of evil would give us meaning, value, significance, security. And don't misunderstand me.

When I say the way of evil, I don't mean just outwardly wicked lifestyle, being a highway robber.

Now, the way of evil is living life without regard to God, valuing other things above him.

[24 : 24] And so you might know a lovely old lady or have a generous and kind neighbor who are not Christians. If they are living life without God, they are on the way of evil.

And so are we if we do the same thing. What could be more offensive to God than just ignoring him? Maybe we don't embrace wisdom because those things we thought about at the start, which we're passionate about, are more valuable to us than God's wisdom.

Maybe the reason we don't embrace wisdom is that we are in deep darkness and can't even see the way. In Romans 3, when Paul is describing sin and the problem with our human nature, he finishes it by saying, there is no fear of God before our eyes.

At any rate, we let our father down. But there is one son who didn't let the father down, who only did what his father told him to do.

He never forsook his father's teaching, but he was forsaken. He kept God's commandments, but died. He loved, embraced, prized the fear of the Lord, but received a crown of thorns.

[25 : 41] He walked the path of righteousness, but was cast into deep darkness. His food was to do the works of his father. Who is this son?

The Lord Jesus Christ. Why did he do it? So that, as it says in 1 Corinthians, he could become for us the wisdom of God. We saw in the two songs at the start, God is our wisdom and Jesus is our wisdom.

Jesus embraced wisdom for his people and took the punishment his people deserve for embracing the way of evil.

Graham Goldsworthy says, in Christian terms, the fear of the Lord means by living by trust in Jesus Christ. He goes on to say, wisdom begins with repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Christ, the wisdom of God makes wisdom so tangible you can touch it. Jesus is the one we need to embrace passionately with everything we've got and as a heart shaper.

[26 : 48] Jesus, as the wisdom of God, can give us everything the father promises to the son if he embraces wisdom. Colossians 2 says, in Christ is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

The beginning of wisdom and the Christian life of wisdom consists in embracing Jesus. Why?

Because he is the lovely one who gives us life.

We saw in Revelation, he's the one who can give us a crown. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, the pathway to the father. He is the light of the world.

Whoever follows him will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of the life, light of life. He is the one who dwells in our hearts through faith and gives his spirit to fix and shape our heart from the inside out.

Friends, God the father today does not just recommend, but commands you to see Jesus for who he is and embrace him. If you're not a Christian, embrace God's wisdom today by trusting in Jesus Christ.

[28 : 01] Receive him and rest on him alone for salvation. Believers, remember your first love. Continue to embrace wisdom by living in accordance with the principles in God's word and world. Because, because you stand in awe of Jesus and trust him as your God. What are you passionate about? Embrace Jesus, the wisdom of God. Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank you. We're thankful for Jesus. We're thankful that he came so that he could become for us wisdom from God. When we think about wisdom and biblical wisdom, it can be so intangible. It sounds so good. We do want it, but we can often think, what is it, Lord? What does it mean to embrace wisdom? And we're thankful that you came and you sent Jesus to be wisdom for us. And to make it easy to grab hold of. Help us embrace wisdom, Lord. [29 : 05] Help us embrace Jesus and live our life because of what he has done for us. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.