

SUMMER 3 - The Getting of Wisdom

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 January 2003

Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 12th of January 2003. The preacher is Paul Barker. His sermon is entitled The Getting of Wisdom and is based on Proverbs chapter 4 verses 1 to 27.

God our Father you speak to us in all sorts of different ways and we come to your word tonight. I intend on hearing you speak to us through it that we may heed your words and walk in the path of wisdom.

And we pray this for the glory of Jesus Christ. Amen. For those of you who are teenagers have perhaps already experienced this or will do so soon.

Your father, maybe your mother, will call you aside and say son or daughter, whatever's appropriate, it's time for a chat.

I need to tell you about the facts of life. You're getting to the age where you're becoming independent and there are various things that I need to tell you. And you can imagine the boy or the girl, probably you recently or in the near future, blushing, feeling very embarrassed, thinking what on earth is my dad going to tell me that I don't already know.

[1 : 22] Well, it's time for the facts of life. And if you're a boy, the facts of life, of course, will be girls. And your dad is not stupid. He's seen the girls round about.

And he wants to alert you, his son, to the girls and what to look out for. And there's one particular girl that he thinks that his son should be keen on.

So he wants to alert his son to look for this particular girl. He's probably seen the others round about as well and doesn't think that they're much chock for his son. So he also wants to warn his son away from them.

Now this father's only doing what his own father once did to him, probably with the same sort of mutual embarrassment at raising the story of the facts of life. But now years down the track, this man who's since become a father recognises the wisdom of what his own father once taught him. And now it's time for this father to tell his son or his sons the facts of life and what to look out for. Because he wants his sons to heed the words of himself as he heeded his own father's words probably many years before.

[2 : 34] And he doesn't want his boys going down the wrong paths. There are plenty of attractive girls who might well lead his boys astray. And he doesn't want anything of that. And so he gathers his sons around him for this serious, probably embarrassing, discussion.

Listen children, sons. Listen to a father's instruction. Be attentive so that you may gain insight. You can imagine the sons cringing, not really wanting to hear what their father's going to say. For I give you good precepts. Do not forsake my teaching. You see, when I was a son with my father, tender, that is inexperienced, immature in the ways of the world, and my mother's favourite I was, he taught me.

And he said to me, let your heart hold fast my words, keep my commandments, and live. Now this father is telling his sons here that this is important information.

You've got to listen to it. You may not want to listen to it, you may not want to heed it, but you've got to because this is very important. It's important because through the words that this father is now saying to his sons, you'll gain insight.

[3 : 53] And also the father is saying, this is good words for you to heed, probably because of his own personal experience. His own father told him, and as he looks back on his life, he recognises the wisdom from his own father.

And so he wants to commend one particular girl for his son. You can imagine if you're the son feeling very embarrassed, thinking it's going to be the ugly one, I don't really want to go after her.

The father says, get wisdom. She's the girl to go after. Get her. Get wisdom. She's the one that you've got to eventually become engaged with.

She's the one that you've got to go after. She's the one that you've got to work out the right chat-up lines with so that you can start going out with her. Get wisdom. Get insight.

Don't forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Wisdom is good for you. She's the one, he says, because if you don't forsake her, she will keep you.

[5 : 00] And if you love her, she'll guard you. Oh yeah, there are all these other girls round about. Fairly attractive, but they're just floozies. If you love them, they're probably not going to love you back.

Go after wisdom. She's the one for you. And if you love her, if you don't forsake her, she'll guard you, she'll keep you, she'll look after you. Indeed, he says, prize her highly, for then she will exalt you.

And she'll honour you if you embrace her. The words and language is maybe not quite erotic, but it's certainly full of love and romance.

Wisdom is the girl for you. She'll place on your head a fair garland, she'll bestow on you a beautiful crown. That is, she's not on about herself and making herself look beautiful in the mirror every day. She's on about making you beautiful and exalting you and honouring you and keeping and guarding you. So my sons, go for her.

[6 : 03] She's the pick of the girls. She's the one to pursue. Make every effort to get her for yourself. Don't settle for second best.

Don't go racing around after all the other girls in the field. Don't settle for another, no matter how attractive she may look on the outside. Get wisdom.

Get insight. Don't forget, don't turn away from my words or from the words of my mouth. The beginning of wisdom is this. Get wisdom.

And whatever else you get, get insight. Now I don't recall my father ever giving me such advice. It's probably why I'm still single.

But of course, the advice here is more than just looking for a girl. It's not dating advice. It's not sex advice. This is life advice.

[7 : 05] These are the real facts of life. This is the stuff that matters far more than anything else. These are a father's words to his sons, a teacher's words to his students, wise in the way of God, his words to young, inexperienced believers about the facts of life.

He's urging his sons, his students, his pupils to be wise, to be wise in this world. A wisdom that begins with the Lord and fear of the Lord as we saw in chapter 1.

A wisdom that refuses to go down wrong paths. A wisdom that resists and avoids temptations in this world. A wisdom that is grounded in and a pursuit of God.

It is an exclusive path, this wisdom. The verbs here about what to do with this girl wisdom, because wisdom is portrayed here as a woman to pursue.

The verbs are relational and they're total. Don't forsake her, beginning of verse 6. Love her, the end of verse 6. Prize her and embrace her in verse 8.

[8 : 17] These are words that convey the sense of infatuation, a total concentration on this girl wisdom. Not someone who's promiscuous, who's flirting around, committing some sort of social, religious adultery with any and every girl.

But this is somebody who's fixed on one, on wisdom. A relationship that is total and absolute. An exclusive, faithful relationship with wisdom.

She is the pearl of great price. She is the one who it is worth spending everything on. There's a story in the paper this week. I can't quite remember all the details, but it was about a bloke who was suing his former girlfriend for over, I think, \$100,000.

It may have been \$300,000. I can't quite remember the figure, but it was a vast figure. And he had spent all that money on his girlfriend, lavished her with presents in the time that he was going out with her.

And she dumped him. And he was suing to get all the money back. The Father is saying here that this woman, wisdom, will never do that for you.

[9 : 31] If you love her, she'll guard you and keep you. If you don't forsake her, she will look after you. You lavish her, she will lavish you back. She will never let you down.

She will never run off after another. She is worth the price of being lavished because in return she pays a high dividend. Well, the sons here seem to be of the age of coming of age.

That seems to be what the context is. Now is the time for them stepping out into the real world. And the son seems to be doing so well prepared because this is not the first time the father has sought to teach his son or his sons the facts of life or information that they need to become adults.

The second paragraph of chapter 4 begins at verse 10 at the top of the next page, page 512. Hear my child. Again, introducing a new, not so much a new topic but a new paragraph.

Hear my child 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.

[10:45] When you walk your step will not be hampered and if you run you will not stumble. The father is saying to the son I've prepared you well. I've already taught you the way of wisdom.

I've already taught you in effect about this woman wisdom. It's as though he's now said I've taught you and you're ready to go out on your own. Now's the time to go and pursue wisdom.

But it's not just an intellectual pursuit this pursuit of wisdom. It's not to become clever in the ways of the world. Wisdom is thoroughly moral.

The wise person is a righteous person throughout the book of Proverbs indeed through the scriptures generally. The path of wisdom is a moral path. So verse 11 says I've taught you the way of wisdom and the same thing is in the next line I've led you in the paths of uprightness.

It's not speaking about two different things. It's one and the same thing. The way of wisdom is the path of uprightness. If you're wise you're upright. That is righteous. That is morally upright in your behaviour.

[11:52] You see wisdom is something that is about righteousness. About living good moral life. That's why it begins with the fear of the Lord. But this is not an easy path to follow.

Because these verses in chapter 4 indeed the whole of Proverbs 1 to 9 in the same sort of context is full of urgency about the exhortation to the sons to pursue the path of wisdom.

And we see that urgency in verse 13. Keep hold of instruction. Don't let it go. Guard her. For she is your life. Three brief commands just like a sort of gunfire.

Bang, bang, bang. followed by a promise. Keep hold of instruction. Don't let her go. Guard her. That is there is an urgency about those commands. Because as these sons go out into the world as sons tender but coming of age there is every opportunity for them to let slip the words they've been taught and to wane in their pursuit of wisdom.

The promise is an overwhelming promise. She is your life. Wisdom is your life. She is everything that matters to you.

[13:06] Life's not worth living without wisdom is what's being said here. If you want life as it's meant to be life as life was created to be life according to the maker's instructions then you need wisdom.

She's your life. Without wisdom life is worthless. There is no other life worth having. Wisdom leads us into life as it's meant to be.

Life as God created it to be. Life that is very good as we see at the end of the first chapter of the Bible when God had made life before the fall.

Life that is abundant to use the words of the great wise one Jesus in John 10. And life ultimately of course as the creator meant it to be is life in his son who is our wisdom according to 1 Corinthians 1.

That is life following the maker's instructions. And if you don't have wisdom then in the end really you don't have life. So she is your life.

[14:12] An overwhelming promise as these sons set out into adulthood. Now the father's words here are not simply about starting a relationship.

He's not simply conveying to his sons I want you to begin a relationship with wisdom. That's part of it as they become adults. But it's certainly not the end. Because he's actually on about in this book of Proverbs not just starting out in a relationship with wisdom but going on through life in the same relationship to its destination.

But at every point of life there are crossroads and junctures to face. At every point there are diverging paths. It's not quite so simple as the first step down the path guarantees the end.

For at every place there are crossroads junctions diverging paths and choices are to be made. The father's command is very blunt and very clear.

Do not enter the path of the wicked and do not walk in the way of evildoers. Avoid it. Don't go on it. Turn away from it.

[15 : 22] Pass on. Again the series of four blunt brief imperatives commands tells us how urgent the situation is.

You see there's no leeway here for a bit of drifting off to one side drifting off to another. There's no saying look so long as you just take a few steps up the path you'll be okay.

None of that at all. There is no allowance made to wander a bit from the path. There is no permission to take one or two steps up each diverging path or crossroad. Temptation is to be fled from avoided and shunned.

Temptation is never to be flirted with. It's not a matter of seeing with temptation or different paths along the track of life how far up them you can go before you stumble and get into trouble. You see evil paths by our wayside are not tests for us to see how strong we are by seeing how far we can go down them before we come astray.

One step is too much in the direction of temptation and evil. These are dangerous paths and we are guaranteed that we will stumble and fall and come to grief if we venture down them at all.

[16 : 37] So the father says in verse 16 and 17 about the evil doers down those paths for they cannot sleep unless they've 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.

That is wickedness and violence is their staple diet. That's what they live for and they long to bring others to their feast of violence. It's bread and wine. These are dangerous paths and one step is too far.

I remember a couple of years ago on holidays in Cambodia and the guidebooks warned us not to go off any main road and even when we went to the chief tourist resort or not resort but chief tourist place of Cambodia the world heritage site of Angkor Wat thousands of tourists more and more each year seeing these extraordinary temples.

Again the guidebooks were very clear. Keep to the main paths and do not venture off at all because Cambodia is still riddled with landmines and you walk down a path and you run the risk of a landmine that has not been detected since the Khmer Rouge days.

That is the same sort of urgency that this writer of Proverbs is conveying to us young believers.

Don't go off the path. Don't take a step away from the path of wisdom.

[18 : 11] Don't think it's safe even one or two. A little sort of observation trek down a side alley or something like that. You are on dangerous territory.

Don't go that way. Verses 18 and 19 sum up this second paragraph. The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn which shines brighter and brighter until full day.

But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness and they do not know what they stumble over.

Clear choice. The path of the righteous or the path of wickedness.

The path of wisdom or the path of folly. They're the two paths that are before us at every point of our life. When we begin on the path of wisdom we cannot say few I've passed the path of wickedness I'm now safe forever because at every point of our life there are junctions and crossroads and diverging paths for us to choose.

The path of wickedness is darkness and along it you stumble and fall not seeing the obstacles in your way. life. The path of righteousness is like the dawn.

[19 : 25] It's becoming light and the further down the path we go the lighter it becomes. After all as the New Testament tells us it is lit by the light of the world and those who follow him will not stumble.

Well I stopped studying science in year 10 at school and the reason I stopped studying science was that one I was bored and two I was squeamish in biology.

I with a couple of others left the room in year 9 or 10 when we had to chop up a bullseye and I could never be a surgeon or a doctor and I squirm even with drawings of anatomy.

Not for me and I admire those who can cope with it somehow who've got iron stomachs. But let me give you a bit of an anatomy lesson from one who doesn't know anything about anatomy or science. But the third paragraph of this chapter gives us an anatomy lesson verses 20 through to 27 at the end of the chapter. The paragraph begins in verse 20 again like verse 10 and verse 1.

[20 : 30] My child, or the first one was actually my sons, plural. But it introduces for us an anatomy lesson. The organs of the entry of wisdom into your life are the ear and the eye.

So verse 20 and 21, my child, be attentive to my words, incline your ear to my sayings, do not let them escape from your sight.

The expression to incline the ear means that we have to make an effort to hear and heed.

Whenever in the Old Testament in particular you get the expression to hear something, it means to hear and obey or follow it.

That is to hear and heed what you hear. And our eye is to fix our sight totally on wisdom. Not to let our eyes wander or drift or be tempted away by the allurements and enticements of the side roads and diverging paths.

Whenever you're walking somewhere, keep your eyes fixed on where you're going. Makes good sense when you're hiking. Makes good sense when you're driving. If you're driving along and suddenly your attention gets taken by something on the side of the road, you can be sure that your car will veer to one side or the other.

[21 : 50] In some ways, the scriptures are like those warning bumps on the side of the roads. You know those ones where you're beginning to drift off to the side of the road, it goes boom, boom, boom, boom and wakes you up and you get back onto the road again.

The scriptures like that really. The warning signs to keep us fixed with our eyes straight ahead. So they're the opening two parts of our anatomy lesson. The organs that provide the entry for wisdom into our life.

The eye and the ear. Secondly, the treasure vault for wisdom is our heart. In the Old Testament, the word heart is the same as what we might say the word mind.

It's not just the emotion but the will, the orientation of our life, the direction of our life and so on. So the end of verse 21 says, keep them within your heart.

So wisdom enters through our eyes and ears as we pay attention to the words of scripture. It takes lodging in our heart or mind. That's the treasure vault within us, the central organ of our life.

[22 : 52] And the heart is the treasure chest to be kept and guarded jealously. So verse 23 says, keep your heart with all vigilance for from it flow the springs of life. It's as though somehow we've even got to set up guard over our heart to guard the treasure of wisdom that has come into it through our eyes and our ears paying attention to God's word.

The value of the treasure that is placed within our heart, the treasure of wisdom, which we saw last week if you remember as well in chapter 3, is priceless. Verse 22 reminds us, for the treasures of wisdom are life to those who find them and healing to all their flesh.

You cannot wish for greater treasure, life and healing. And it comes through wisdom. And of course wisdom is life-giving because it's the words of the life-giver and the one who gives eternal life to boot.

So, so far the anatomy lesson tells us that it's the eye and the ear that pays attention to God's words that brings in wisdom, which lodges then in our heart the treasure placed within us. And now comes the anatomy of expressing wisdom.

Negatively, verse 24 tells us, the wrong use of our lips and our mouth. That's unwise, that's folly.

Put away from you crooked speech and put devious talk far from you.

[24 : 14] That's because the wise person is an upright person. Their speech will be direct and truthful, not devious or convoluted or confusing. Positively, the right use of our eyes.

Verse 25, let your eyes look directly forward and your gaze be straight before you. Reminds me when I read these verses of cadet, when I was in the cadets at school.

Eyes front. And we had to stand there with our eyes ahead not looking to one side or the other. So it is here, our eyes must be firmly fixed ahead to avoid temptation by the wayside.

And then final part of the anatomy lesson in the last two verses is the use of our feet. Feet that are walking straight ahead in line with our eyes that are pointing straight ahead. Keep straight the path of your feet and all your ways will be sure.

Do not swerve to the right or the left. Turn your foot away from evil. Well, in effect, the whole body is involved here. The ears and the eyes to let wisdom in, the heart to treasure it within us.

[25 : 18] And then our lips, our mouth, our eyes, literally our eyelids and our feet to express it in action. Well, whenever you're driving along, going to some place you've never been before and you get lost, almost inevitably, the reason is because you take a wrong turn or you don't take the turn that you should have taken.

You turn too soon or you miss the right turn. It's happened countless times in my life, wherever I am. I'm hopeless at getting, I find it easy to get lost because like most males, I guess, I'm too stubborn to look at the street directory.

And I remember sometimes, one time in particular, travelling with a friend on holidays, missing a key turn in Turkey, trying to drive on the wrong side of the road. Go down there, he said.

And I said, I can't. I've got cars here. And we had this row in the middle of this big roundabout in the city of Izmir. The urgency of, that's the way we should be going, is conveyed in this chapter.

See, this is not just a sort of nice summer's evening type chapter about, you know, wandering along the path of life. There is urgency here. Don't go that way. Don't take a step down there. Avoid that turn.

[26 : 29] Avoid the evil path. Avoid the wicked path over there. Keep your eyes straight ahead. There's urgency in all of these commands. From the teacher to the son, from the father to the son, the teacher to the student, from the wise man.

To those who are setting out on the life and life of wisdom. You see, life is strewn with confusing intersections. There are key intersections in our life and many of them are confusing.

A new job offer. Or the transition from one school to another. One house to another. A neighbourhood to another. From singleness to marriage. From school to university.

Or university to getting a job. Or from getting a job to retirement. From being single to beginning a relationship. Or changing a relationship. They're all key intersections in our life and they are often very confusing.

And they are key times when people who set out on the path of wisdom go astray. Now it's not just key times though in our life when this happens. There are daily intersections in our life.

[27 : 32] Boredom. Tiredness. Peer group pressure. TV. Or internet. It is easy to take the wrong path.

It looks so tempting. It promises so much. A little dabble can't be harmless. But remember the Cambodian landmines. One false step may be fatal.

The warning signs there involve a skull and crossbones or something similar to that if my memory is right. Inevitably the wrong path fails to deliver on what it promises and its destination is never what it says it is.

The path of life. The path of life as life should be is the path of God's wisdom. Wisdom above anything else is to be prized and embraced and sought after and loved.

Our ears are to be deliberately inclined to God's wisdom every day. Our eyes must never lose sight of the wisdom of God for us every day.

[28 : 48] For if we are in our daily intersections and our crucial transitions and intersections to keep on the path of wisdom pursuing eternal life in Christ who is our wisdom then our ears and our eyes must be attentive and our heart must be guarded so that our mouth and our eyes and our feet and our bodies will keep walking the right path of wisdom.

The question was one of the crossroads I talked about a sort of daily crossroad would be to do with boredom and tiredness.

That's because I think when we're bored or when we're tired we're particularly vulnerable to going off on wrong paths I think. We're not quite as keeping our eyes straight and so on.

We're looking around for something different, something new and that may or may not be something good. Is the moral thing always the wisest thing to do? Yes ultimately I think so.

That is always doing what is right is the wisest thing to do. If that's what you mean. Even if it doesn't feel like it definitely. We ought to trust God's word more than our conscience on such matters.

[30 : 12] Well Olive's question is related to the verse about keeping your heart with all vigilance for from it flow the springs of life and I think guarding our heart is tied up with keeping our eyes straight or our eyes focused on wisdom and our ears inclined to it.

That is the entry point of wisdom has got to be maintained and that's the way of guarding what goes in. So if our eyes and our ears are focused on the right things then what comes into our heart will be the right thing.

To use a New Testament I think in the end sort of an equivalent Paul in Philippians 4 verse 7 says think on truth. Whatever is good, noble, pure and so on think on that.

And that I think is the same sort of idea that we guard our heart by making sure that what enters it is right and pure. Make sure you get sleep.

I think I mean practical ways about guarding our heart. Yes I mean clearly reading the scriptures clearly being in Christian fellowship clearly being regular sitting under God's word in its various ways Bible studies sermons and daily devotions and so on.

[31 : 23] They're crucial ways of guarding our heart practically I think. But having prayer partners, mentors, some sort of accountability structure, those sorts of things, being aware of when we're weak, being ready to pray.

I think a sign of our vulnerability is when we're less ready to pray to God to help us to do what is right and strengthen us. Being aware that we are very weak people.

Often I think you know we kid ourselves and think that somehow we're strong. But we're not. None of us is. No matter how wise we are. In fact the wiser we are the weaker we know we are. So there's some practical sorts of things.

I think sometimes the decisions about this job over that job fits into the description of wisdom that we're finding here. This is sort of, I was going to say broad brush sort of wisdom but it's actually not. It's actually very deep on very significant moral issues and spiritual issues, theological issues.

Sometimes our job choice is in that area. I mean to give a bizarre example you're offered two jobs.

[32 : 30] One as a school teacher, one as a prostitute. I think it's fairly obvious which one. But you see the decision at that point actually impinges on this nature of wisdom. But at the level of God's guidance about what do you take job A, job B?

I don't think that's what the wisdom of the book of Proverbs is really on about in the end. But we've always got to test the options to see whether there are moral issues or theological issues that compromise one of the options a lot.

But sometimes God gives us a freedom to choose A or B, whatever we like.