

September 12, 2021

“Making Right Choices”
Lesson 2 of Unit

Proverbs 4:10-15, 20-27

Intro

Everyone can think back to a time when they made a good (right) choice, and the benefits that came from it. And most can also think of a poor (wrong) choice that had negative results. Most of us wish we had had someone with us to re-direct our thinking and help us make a better, wiser choice.

Today’s study from Proverbs 4 are the sixth and seventh “lectures” from a father to his son regarding choices and outcomes. Obviously, believers can benefit from learning the principles that enable them to make wiser choices, and show them how to avoid both negative choices and the negative outcomes that result.

Read Proverbs 4:10-15

1. vs. 10: The first phrase “Listen, my son, accept what I say” is used in variations in Proverbs
It shows up 7 times in chapters 1-9, and another 5 in chapter 10-31
The beginning chapters of Proverbs stress that value of wisdom
Chapter 4:1-9 dealt with the supreme importance of wisdom, leading to this verse

Listening suggests having an open mind
To receive a teaching, to be willing to obey it
“Accept what I say” is a plea from a father to a son to receive valuable teaching
It’s like saying, “I’ve never steered you wrong before; please listen now”

The second phrase gives the benefit of listening to and obeying wise counsel
“the years of your life will be many”
Walking in the right way of life has two initial benefits
A promise of long life
Making good choices usually results in healthy and safe outcomes
A likelihood of a high quality of life
Making good choices results in positive outcomes than enhance life

2. vs. 11: The father explains why the son should listen to him
“I guide you in the way of wisdom”
The father is teaching his son wise things, beneficial things
“(I) lead you along straight paths”
The father leads—he is going the same way, in wisdom
He wants the son to follow the wise way he is already going
“Path” indicates a way that has already been traveled by others before
It is obvious, easily seen; many others have walked this same path
Following the “path” of wisdom walked by others is a wise choice
The path is “straight”—it is a way of morally rightness and correctness

3. vs. 12: Continued benefits of following the father on the “straight paths” of wisdom

1) “When you walk, your steps will not be hampered”

Walking (or running in the next part) are figures of speech describing going through one’s daily activities

One’s daily “walk” in life can be faced with obstacles

Making the right choice of where/how to walk prevents many obstacles

No one’s life is ever going to be obstacle-free; Scripture tells us that

The one who walks in wisdom will face fewer, and be able to handle them better/easier than the one who doesn’t walk this path

2) “When you run, you will not stumble”

Running is faster than walking, so has a greater chance of stumbling

This could be referring to moving faster than one should

This could also be referring to the fast-paced hecticness of daily life

The father says that in following wisdom “you will not stumble”

Again, no guarantee of an obstacle-free life

The suggestion is that following wisdom will allow for a smoother life

4. vs. 13: The father’s command here is similar to what he says in vs. 10

Accept wisdom in vs. 10; hold on to instruction (wisdom) in vs. 13

The promise in vs. 10 is “long life”; the promise here is that wisdom “is your life”

Wisdom is that element which brings quality of life, not just more days

The father is insistent—“do not let it go; guard it well”

It is so valuable and beneficial it is to be protected like a treasured possession

5. vs. 14: “Straight paths” were mentioned in vs. 11; now “the path of the wicked” is mentioned

As there are obvious paths that the righteous follow, there are obvious paths that the wicked have developed

Both these “paths” can be seen in the actions and results of people’s lives

There are two paths in life—the way of wisdom and the way of the wicked

The father warns not to even “set foot on the path of the wicked”

Even getting on the path makes it easier to begin walking that path

6. vs. 15: The language of this verse is strong, direct, and without possibility of misunderstanding

“Avoid”, “do not travel”, “turn from”, “go on”

There are no options here

The implication is that there can be no “walking both sides of the road”

One can’t swap back and forth, do one for awhile and then the other, etc

“Do not travel on it!”

The father says, “Go on your way”

Walk on the path of wisdom/righteousness

Avoid, don’t even touch, the path of the wicked

This verse echoes vs. 14—there are two paths of life, the wise and the wicked

If one chooses wisdom, they should never choose the wicked again

One avoids the path of the wicked by staying on the path of wisdom

Read Proverbs 4:20-27

7. vs. 20: This verse begins the 7th lecture from the father to his son about wisdom
Notice the similarity of wording to vs. 10
“Pay close attention to what I say; listen closely to my words”
Several body parts will be used as ways to help one walk wisely
Here it’s the ears—“listen”
Imagine directing attention to make sure you hear what is said
Facing the person directly, cupping your ear to block out distractions
8. vs. 21: Two body parts are used here
“Do not let them (the father’s words of wisdom) out of your sight”—eyes
Keep your eyes on the goal
Father’s words encourage the son to concentrate on what is most important

“...keep them within your heart”
The heart is our term for the center of our being
Our intellect, emotions, will, and attitudes
The eyes and the ears are how things get in—the heart is where things reside
9. vs. 22: The word “for” introduces the reason why the father gives this admonition
His words of counsel are life
They produce a healthy body from following sound spiritual disciplines
They produce a quality life lived from these principles
10. vs. 23: As with vs. 21, the heart is used as meaning the basis of our behavior
Since it is figuratively the center of our thinking and emotions, the father says to
“guard your heart above all else” (reversed phrases here)
It is the most important “organ” in our spiritual lives
Therefore, it is to be guarded and protected above all others
It’s like a combination of the king and queen pieces in chess
11. vs. 24: This verse brings up the mouth, in two phrases that mean the same thing
“Put away” is the same as “far from your lips”
“perversity/mouth” is the same as “corrupt talk”

The mouth speaks according to the heart (Luke 6:45, Rom. 10:10)
These things could be good, but the warning here is to stay away from “corrupt talk”
Mindless things, gossip, angry words, misusing God’s name
We are not only to put these things away, but put them far away

12. vs. 25: Another use of parallelism here (using two different phrases that mean the same thing)

“Let your eyes” = “fix your gaze”

“straight ahead” = “directly before you”

This is an echo of 4:11 earlier in this lesson

“lead you along straight paths”

Both verses are referring to correct behavior and choices as being “straight”

To focus is said to be “looking straight ahead”

This suggests also that distraction is looking anywhere besides straight ahead

Distractions lead us off the straight path, and away from wisdom

13. vs. 26: “Make level paths” here is translated as “evaluate” in other translations

Evaluate the paths of your feet = think about where you go, what you do, and why

When we do this, we will more likely take the paths that are firm (wise)

Wisdom comes not just from knowing what is right, but choosing to do it as well

14. vs. 27: The previous verse said what *to* do; this verse says what *not* to do

“Do not swerve to the right or the left”

In other words, stay on the straight path

The idea is getting off the straight path is heading into evil

Doing this will “keep your feet from evil”

This idea of “keeping your feet from evil” echoes the idea in vs. 14 above

“Do not...walk in the way of evil men”

Application: Those who are called wise in Scripture are those who receive instruction and then apply it to their lives. The result of both receiving and applying is a quality life and a close connection to God. Today’s passage emphasizes the need to choose the right path of listening to and applying the wisdom passed down to us. There are always two paths: the wise way and the wicked way. There isn’t a middle ground. And we choose one or the other with every decision we make in life, large or small.

Prayer: Father God, we ask for Your wisdom. Thank you for providing it in both the Bible and in the counsel of wise people around us. We ask for the will to make right choices in life. Fill our hearts with a desire to hear Your voice, see the way more clearly, and have feet that stay on the path of wisdom. In Jesus’ name, Amen.