



THE CHOICE

All people have a choice to make: follow God or reject Him.

PROVERBS 4:11-27

Life is filled with choices—maybe too many choices, but choices nonetheless. Hearing the truth demands a response as well, a choice to either embrace or reject the truth. There is no neutrality when it comes to the truth. Neutrality is a choice to reject the truth. Solomon's plea in Proverbs 4 to hear, obey, and not turn away from the wisdom of God reminded God's people of the choices that lay before them. To embrace God's wisdom provides a way through life; to reject God's wisdom is to ensure destruction.

Have you gotten confused over a choice because you had so many options? How did you make the choice?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

PROVERBS 4:1-27

In chapters 1–3, Solomon began to lay out the dimensions of God’s wisdom. He then called God’s people to “listen” and “pay attention” (4:1). He knew that information does not necessarily mean transformation and facts do not always lead to obedient faith. Solomon urged God’s people to hear and apply God’s truth.

The path of wisdom is defined in 4:1-11. Solomon reminded God’s people to remember the wisdom of God as though they were remembering the wisdom of their fathers and mothers. He challenged them not to abandon God’s instruction but to obtain its wise counsel at all costs. No price is too high to obtain God’s truth. Further, Solomon called God’s people to embrace and cherish truth as if it were a precious commodity.

Then, as if to add layer upon layer of the choices God’s people must make to live according to God’s wisdom, Solomon described in striking terms two separate ways of living (vv. 11-27). One way leads to destruction and the other way leads to life. The decision to remain in one’s sin, devoid of the wisdom of God, is a choice set before all people. All people are already in the way of sin and destruction; God’s wisdom and grace in Jesus Christ is the only exit ramp off the way of the unwise.

Read Proverbs 4:11-27, looking for the contrasts between the two choices offered. How does Solomon describe the different results of the choices?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE PATH TO TAKE (PROV. 4:11-13)

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.

VERSES 11-12

Godly wisdom is more than information to be obtained; it is a way of life to be lived. A life of wisdom is a life lived in light of God's truth. Verse 11 pictures life as a journey. It is vitally important to choose the right path on life's journey. God's wisdom will guide us ***on straight paths.***

Without God's wisdom to guide us, we'll run the risk of taking the wrong path, a crooked road that leads to destruction. Foolish people take that path. But wise believers seek God's guidance so we can choose the right path, the straight road that leads to a fulfilling life.

Verse 12 describes the walk of God's people on the path of wisdom. ***When you walk*** suggests the image of a continual and ongoing activity. The pace of our journey will change as we follow the path of God's wisdom. At times, we'll be walking. At other times, however, we will ***run***. Of course, running increases the risk of stumbling. An obscure obstacle lying on the track can trip even the fastest runner. A careful eye will keep an athlete from tripping over the obstacle and taking a tumble. Similarly, godly instruction will prevent us from being tripped up by the circumstances we face in life. Whether walking or running, Solomon called God's people to stay on the path of wisdom.

VERSE 13

Solomon used three images to make his point about staying on the straight path of wisdom. First, we are told to ***hold on to*** godly ***instruction***. How do we hold on to godly instruction that helps us to be wise in the Lord? It needs to be used. God's truth can be useless to us if we tuck it away for safekeeping but never take time to consider it, listen to it, and follow it. The Bible offers us a wealth of godly wisdom and shows us how to be wise in Him. Too often, Bibles gather dust as they sit idly on tables, nightstands, and shelves. The treasure of God's Word makes a difference to us only when we place it in our hearts. That's how we ***hold on to*** godly instruction.

Second, ***don't let go*** of God's wisdom and truth. Like hanging on to the guardrails overlooking a steep ravine, Solomon encouraged God's people to cling to God and His wisdom.

Third, Solomon called on his son to ***guard*** the wisdom of God. Why was Solomon so impassioned about guarding godly instruction? He would answer this question with this singular



truth: *for it* (the wisdom of God) *is your life*. God's wisdom is not optional equipment; it is life! Paul echoed this same idea when he declared Christ to be our very life. (See Col. 3:4.)

How does following God's wisdom lead to life? What happens to our ability to choose the way of wisdom when we do not take seriously the consequences of choosing the opposite of wisdom?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Scripture*

The Holy Bible is a perfect treasure of divine instruction (Ps. 19:7-10).

THE PATH TO AVOID (PROV. 4:14-19)

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.

VERSES 14-15

There is, however, another path—*the path of the wicked*. Verses 14-15 consist of six commands related to the path of the wicked:

- *keep off*
- *don't proceed*
- *avoid it*
- *don't travel on it*
- *turn away from it*
- *pass it by*

This path to be avoided is jammed with people like a busy highway. The ones on this path are described as *the wicked* and *evil ones*. Jesus gave a similar warning: “Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it. How narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it” (Matt 7:13-14).

VERSES 16-17

The life of the wicked is a sleepless one. Solomon argued that they *can't sleep unless they have done what is evil* or they *make someone stumble*. Wickedness can consume a person to the point of keeping him or her awake at night. Evil people may lie in bed with nothing on their minds except how they can hurt someone. They won't be able to sleep until they have brought despair, grief, or sorrow to the doorstep of some unsuspecting victim. Causing an innocent individual to stumble and fall brings an evil kind of satisfaction to the wicked that allows them to settle in for a good night's sleep.

Solomon added that these evil individuals *eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence*. Using the image of eating and drinking, Solomon shed light on how people behave when they follow the path of wickedness. They gorge themselves with dishes made with wickedness and violence. They keep on consuming this bread and wine of evil and never get tired of it. In fact, they only want more.

Solomon's point is that wickedness is the willful and deliberate activity of the wicked. It is this type of lifestyle that the righteous must avoid.

How does wickedness lead to more wicked acts? What examples reinforce Solomon's teaching?

VERSES 18-19

In these two verses, Solomon summarized in clear and concise terms the two paths set before God's people. *The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, shining brighter and brighter until midday*. Wisdom brings light and understanding. Those who



live by God's wisdom are on a path that is righteous. This path is growing brighter and brighter; it is a path of growth and maturity.

Conversely, *the way of the wicked is like the darkest gloom; they don't know what makes them stumble*. The further the wicked venture into wickedness the less they are able to see. The path of the wicked is both dark and blinding. The apostle Paul wrote, "the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4).

The path to avoid is the path of the wicked. The path to choose is the path of godly wisdom—a path that is entered through faith in Jesus Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

If the path of wisdom is so clear and beneficial, why do so many not choose it?

THE CHOICE TO MAKE (PROV. 4:20-27)

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.

VERSES 20-22

Again, Solomon urged his son to *pay attention to* his words. He didn't want his sayings to go in one ear and out the other. He called his son to *listen closely ... don't lose sight of them; keep them within your heart*. The heart is the center of life.

The benefits of living a godly and wise life are many; Solomon listed two in verse 22. First, the godly instructions of the Word of God are *life to those who find them*. Secondly, they are *health to one's whole body*. Wisdom is beneficial and even life-giving to the wise, impacting both body and soul.

For Solomon the choice was clear: avoid all wickedness. It leads to blindness and death. Embrace God's wisdom that leads to light and life, brings glory to God, and results in a life of purpose and peace.

Why was Solomon so repetitive in reminding his son to remember his words?

VERSE 23

How can God's people choose the path of wisdom and righteousness? Choosing the path of wisdom is a matter of the **heart**. Godly wisdom calls on believers to **guard** our hearts **above all else**. Our hearts serve as the physical, emotional, and spiritual source of our lives. What we put in our hearts determines how we live. We can guard our hearts by making sure we're wise about what we allow to dwell there. If we let our hearts be filled with foolish thoughts, we will pay a price in foolish actions. If we allow God's instruction to dwell in our hearts, we will reap the reward of a life lived wisely.

Controlling our words starts with examining our hearts.

VERSE 24

Solomon urged his son to be disciplined regarding what came out of his mouth. The discipline of our speech reflects the purity of our hearts. To use our lips **deviously** means to twist our words in an attempt to be misleading. Jesus taught that the words that come from our mouths reveal what's in our hearts (Matt. 12:34). Controlling our words, therefore, starts with examining our hearts.

VERSES 25-27

Choosing the path of wisdom is also a matter of vision and focus. We're challenged to be wise about what we do with our **eyes**. The writer of Hebrews called on his readers to lay aside all sins and distractions and to keep their eyes on Jesus. (See Heb. 12:1-2.) To **look forward** and **fix your gaze straight ahead** reminds us not to be



distracted from God's purpose for our lives. From an awareness of God's purpose of our lives, we're able to make wise choices.

Don't turn to the right or to the left; keep your feet away from evil, warned Solomon. He knew the tyranny of distraction and of the immediate. He knew that unless God's people were continually focused on God and His truth, they would easily stray off the path of righteousness. Turning to the right or the left indicates a diversion away from God's path. Staying focused on His path keeps the feet of the righteous away from evil.

What is so enticing about wickedness that it causes us to lose our focus on what is right and good?

BIBLE SKILL: *Identify the imagery in a verse or passage and discover what it communicates.*

Reflect on Proverbs 4:11-27 and the implications of thinking about life as a journey. Write about what the picture of life as a journey teaches us about following the Lord or rejecting Him. For believers, what does it say to us about growing toward spiritual maturity in Christ? Give consideration to what Jesus communicated when He mentioned the wide gate and the narrow gate (Matt. 7:13-14).

IN MY CONTEXT

- Following godly instruction leads to life.
- Wicked living leads to more wickedness and dissatisfaction.
- Righteous living calls for disciplined living.

***List the barriers that can keep you from choosing the way of wisdom.
How can your awareness help you overcome those barriers?***

Look for areas in your life where one step toward wickedness has caused another step. What actions can get you back on the right track?

In what areas of your life do you need to be more disciplined? Discuss with your Bible study group ways of helping each other be more disciplined in your spiritual walk.

Prayer Needs

