

## Proverbs 4:1-27

### Everyday Wisdom: The Wisdom of Discipleship

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My college pastor, **Andrew Davies**, took an interest in my **spiritual growth**. He met up with me for **lunch**, we did a **Bible study** together with some other guys, he listened to my **concerns** and **prayed** for me, he lead me on a **missions** trip to **Chinle Arizona**, and he **paid** for my **plane ticket** to go to a **Christian conference** in **Seattle**. He invested in me and he mentored me. He became one of my **spiritual fathers**. A spiritual father or mother is someone who comes **alongside** you and **walks** with you in your faith, helping you study the **Bible** and **pray**, and **encouraging** you in your walk with **Jesus**. Andrew **discipled** me.

If you could have that **would you want it**? Would you want a **more mature** man or woman in the faith to come and mentor and disciple you? This could be someone **older**, or **younger**, but the **key** is that they have **walked this path before**, it's not that they have it **mastered**, but they can help you on your way and maybe **you** can teach them something too. This is **discipleship**.

Today in **Proverbs 4** we find a **biological father** who is also the **spiritual father** to his **son**. Now this is not always the **case**. You can have a spiritual father or spiritual mother who is not your biological parent. But in today's Proverb we find a father who is **both**. The reason he turned out this way is because he too had a spiritual father who discipled him, his actual biological father.

#### **Proverbs 4:1-3**

- 1 Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction;  
pay attention and gain understanding.
- 2 I give you sound learning,  
so do not forsake my teaching.
- 3 For I too was a son to my father,  
still tender, and cherished by my mother. (NIV)

**Discipleship** is when one person pours **God's words and ways** (God's **wisdom**) into another person to help them **know and follow Christ** and that person pours into a **third person** and so on and so on. Here we see it **beautifully illustrated** in a **family**. A **father** is teaching his **sons** what his **father** taught him. That's **three generations** of discipleship. That's three generation of studying God's Word and living God's ways.

Do you **want** a spiritual father or spiritual mother? Do you want to be **discipled**? This isn't a **theoretical question**. **Pray about it** this week and if you want one come back next week and we will find you one. Maybe **someone comes to mind**. Go talk to them. Ask them, "Will you meet with me **regularly** to **pray**, **study God's Word**, and **talk** about life?" The point is. We all need **discipleship**.

### **We all need a spiritual father or spiritual mother. (v1-9)**

Our pattern in Proverbs has been a father writing to his "son" but in verse one he's writing to his "**sons**." It's **plural**. Maybe we shouldn't **make too much** of it but at the very least this father is expecting his teaching to **multiply**. He's expecting his teaching to go to all **his sons** or his **son's sons**, his **grandchildren**. He expects his teachings to form his sons and daughters and that **they too** would become spiritual fathers and mothers to their **biological** and **spiritual children** (aka. anyone else they disciple).

Now as I broaden the scope of what it means to be a **disciple-maker** I also don't want to be too quick to downplay the **family mandate** Proverbs 4 is laying out for **dads** and **moms**. Remember chapter one?

### **Proverbs 1:8**

Listen, my son, to your father's instruction  
and do not forsake your mother's teaching. (NIV)

God has called dads and moms to be the first ones to teach their kids the **Word** of God and the **ways** of Christ Jesus (Eph 6:4).<sup>1</sup> In January the Elders and myself introduced a **discipleship pathway**—which is a way we can all **try to make sure** we're growing in our faith. One of the **key** elements of our discipleship pathway, which [you can learn more about on our website](#), is "**Prayer & Bible Study**" but the pathway explains that one element further by adding this is both "personal" and "family." In other words, we should all be spending time in prayer and studying the Scriptures personally and as families.

What's really cool is that this lines up exactly with our **Children's Ministry Team's mission**. Let me read to you what the Children's team put together as their **mission statement**.

The Children's Ministry of Cornerstone Congregational Church is tasked with coming alongside parents and families as they strive to raise, teach, and disciple the children God has graciously given them. Our church feels the weighty responsibility of supporting families, teaching truth, and providing opportunities for children and families to serve in our congregation and community.  
([Children's Ministry Team](#))

The children's team recognizes that you are the **first person** God has called to disciple your **child**. He may have also called your **youth leader**, or kid's **Sunday School teacher**, but none of them have as much **time** with your children as you do. Look what the results are for those parents who really **take serious** their child's knowledge of God. **One day your child will pass on their faith to their children.**

### **Proverbs 4:4-5**

4 Then he (my father) taught me, and he said to me,  
    "Take hold of my words with all your heart;  
    keep my commands, and you will live."  
5 Get wisdom, get understanding;  
    do not forget my words or turn away from them. (NIV)

This father is **quoting** what **his father** told him. When we're deciding how to live out our faith the first person we're going to **naturally copy** is the ones who had the **biggest affect** on our lives, our **parents**. As parents that should strike the **fear of the Lord** in our hearts. If we're not reading the word with our kids and praying with them **who will?** "**Do what I say but not what I do?**" No. "Do what I say and what I do." If you're a parent, God has called you to **actively teach** your **child wisdom** (God's Word and God's ways).

### **Proverbs 4:6-9**

6 Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you;  
    love her, and she will watch over you.  
7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom.  
    Though it cost all you have, get understanding.  
8 Cherish her, and she will exalt you;  
    embrace her, and she will honor you.  
9 She will give you a garland to grace your head  
    and present you with a glorious crown." (NIV)

The **message his father** told him was **simple**. Seek to understand **the Scriptures** and live your life **that way**. Wisdom will **keep you out of trouble**. Wisdom will lead you on **the right path** and **reward** you. And now he's passing this message along to his **sons**.

For some of us we **may** have kids who have **decided not to walk** in the **way of wisdom**. We **tried really hard** to share **our faith** with them but they've done their **own thing** and all we can do is **watch**. **Proverbs are principles not promises**. You've **done your part**. It's up to your **son** or **daughter** to decide. All we can do is **pray** and **offer wisdom** when God gives us the opportunity.

**But** what about those of us who **don't have Christian parents** or whose parents are **gone** or who just **won't do this**? No matter what age you are God can provide you with a spiritual **parent** or **mentor** to guide you on your way. Think to the **New Testament** and the **Apostle Paul's** relationship with **Timothy**. Timothy had a **Christian mother** and **grandmother** who taught him **the faith** (2 Tim 1:5) but he also needed **Paul**.

**2 Timothy 2:1-2** You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. (NIV)

Paul became a spiritual father to Timothy but he expected Timothy to become a spiritual father to the **men** and **women of his church**—to pass along the teachings of Christ Jesus. **Whose** your Paul? And whose your **Timothy**? We should get one of each. Whose **discipling you** and who are **you discipling**? Who can you **receive** from and who can you **pour God's Word into**? *We all need a spiritual father or spiritual mother.*

When we went to the **Habitat for Humanity** work day in June **Bill from Billerica** oversaw our job that day. Bill had lots of experience working in **construction**. He was retired and **volunteered** with Habitat to help build houses. He showed me how to drill a hole in the **cement flooring** in the basement so they could install a **sump pump**. First he **showed me**, and then I got on the **power drill**, and **then I did it**. He left me and I worked for a **couple hours** on it. Then **Jared**, our **old Cornerstone intern** who just finished **college**, finished working on the upstairs and he came to **help me**. So I showed him exactly what Bill had shown me and **then he did it**. First **Bill learned**, then **Jonathan**, then **Jared**, and if we'd been there long enough maybe Jared would have shown **Bernie** how to do it. It's no different with **discipleship**. First I learn, then I **pass** it along, and then the person I pass it along to passes it along to **someone else**. **Andrew Davies** poured God's Word into me and now I'm pouring into **Caleb**, and **Henry**, and **Jeremy** and I hope they'll pour into others. Instead of drilling down into cement flooring we are **drilling God's Word down deep into our human hearts**, which sometimes can be **harder than concrete**. Discipleship is **not easy** or **clean**. It's **messy**. It's about **people**. How could it be **anything else**? But as we **receive** discipleship and **give** it to others we will **grow** in what it means to be a **follower of Christ**. Why is this **so important**?

**We all need a spiritual father or spiritual mother to help us find the way of wisdom. (v10-19)**

Once again we are given **two options** for how to live—the **way of the foolish** or the **way of the wise**.

**Proverbs 4:10-17**

- 10 Listen, my son, accept what I say,  
and the years of your life will be many.
- 11 I instruct you in the way of wisdom  
and lead you along straight paths.
- 12 When you walk, your steps will not be hampered;  
when you run, you will not stumble.
- 13 Hold on to instruction, do not let it go;

- guard it well, for it is your life.  
14 Do not set foot on the path of the wicked  
or walk in the way of evildoers.  
15 Avoid it, do not travel on it;  
turn from it and go on your way.  
16 For they cannot rest until they do evil;  
they are robbed of sleep till they make someone stumble.  
17 They eat the bread of wickedness  
and drink the wine of violence. (NIV)

If this passage sounds familiar that's good because it's actually a lot like **chapter three**. Once again the **author Solomon** is contrasting the **two paths, wisdom and folly**. He calls his son to listen to and hold onto **instruction** (v10-11, 13). This isn't just **any instruction**, but instruction based on **God's Word**. He was to **study** all the **Hebrew Scriptures** available at that time and we are to study the **whole Bible** today. So if you want to walk in the **way of wisdom** you **got to read the book**.

I've recently learned some **basic sign language** for the **song Jesus Loves Me**. Monica and I try to sing it to Elijah. I'm not sure you could call what I do singing or signing. When we sing "Jesus loves me this I know **for the Bible tells me so**" the sign for **Bible** is **signing Jesus**, which is touching the **nail marks** and then **palms** together and then open like **opening a book**. The **Bible** is **Jesus' book**. But notice when you sign Jesus' "book" you have to **open it** for it to be the book. God's Word will be **without power** in our lives if we **never open it**. **What would your sign be for the Bible?** Is it **opened** or **closed**? Let's open God's word so we can guide our family, biological or spiritual. The **reward** is that **if** our children choose to walk in it they will be **protected** from **wickedness**. But not only that. Any who choose the way of wisdom will **walk in the light** and in the **path of righteousness**.

#### **Proverbs 4:18-19**

- 18 The path of the righteous is like the morning sun,  
shining ever brighter till the full light of day.  
19 But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness;  
they do not know what makes them stumble. (NIV)

The word **stumble** is used **three times** to describe the **way of the foolish**. There's **only pain** that way. See there's a **close connection** between wisdom and the **tangible physical world**, which we see next. The way of wisdom may be **spiritual** but it's **not abstract**. It's **not invisible** but **seen**. Wisdom is **concrete** and **real**. As we read notice all the different **physical body parts**.

#### **Proverbs 4:20-27**

- 20 My son, pay attention to what I say;  
turn your ear to my words. (**ear**)  
21 Do not let them out of your sight, (**eyesight**)  
keep them within your heart; (**heart**)  
22 for they are life to those who find them  
and health to one's whole body. (**body**)  
23 Above all else, guard your heart, (**heart**)  
for everything you do flows from it.  
24 Keep your mouth free of perversity; (**mouth**)  
keep corrupt talk far from your lips. (**lips**)  
25 Let your eyes look straight ahead; (**eyesight**)  
fix your gaze directly before you.

- 26 Give careful thought to the paths for your feet (**feet**)  
and be steadfast in all your ways.  
27 Do not turn to the right or the left;  
keep your foot from evil. (**feet**) (NIV)

It's what we do with our **ears** and **hearts** and **eyes** and **mouth** and **lips** and **feet** that helps us grow **more wise** or **more foolish**. It's not just about **keeping the bad out but also bringing the good in**.

- **Ears** - I want to **protect** my ears from **gossip**. If someone comes up to you and starts talking **negatively** about someone else say, "**Stop! Is this gossip?** If so, let's say something **positive** about them." Then you're not only **protecting** your ears but filling them up with **encouragement**.
- **Eyes** - I want to **guard** what **entertainment** I watch and **fill** my sight with **creation**, **family**, and **beauty**. So that may mean **skipping** past that **Netflix** show or turning the TV off and playing **games** with your kids.
- **Body** - I want to **protect** myself from **laziness** and **gluttony** and fill myself with **good foods** and **diligence**. That means not only not **laying around all day** but **getting a job or volunteering** so I can **serve** others.
- **Mouth/lips** - I want to prevent my own mouth from **speaking gossip** or **lies** and want to **fill** my **mouth** and speak **grace**, **truth**, and **encouragement**. Who can you speak an **encouraging word** to today? Who can you tell "You know **I really appreciate** this about you?"
- **Feet** - I want to not walk myself into **tempting** situations at the **shopping center** or **work** or **anywhere else** but use my feet to **bring a needy person or a friend a meal** or share the **gospel news**.
- **Heart** - My heart is the **center** of my **identity**. I want to **guard** the **core** of who I am by **filling** myself up with **wisdom**. Who am I **putting into** my heart? Christ or the world?

The **only reason** we can **begin to do this** is because **Jesus laid down** his **ears** and **eyes** and **body** and **mouth** and **feet** and **heart** for us. He **offered** himself up as an **exchange**. His **body** for **ours**. His **righteousness** for our **wickedness**. His **wisdom** for our **foolishness** (1 Cor 1:30). His **death** for our **life** (Col 3:3-4). If you **want wisdom** don't walk out of here **trying harder**. Repent of your sins and **invite Christ** through the power of his **Holy Spirit** to come and work on you and then find a **spiritual parent** to help you grow.

*We all need a spiritual father or spiritual mother to help us find the way of wisdom.* I've had **several mentors, spiritual fathers**, the last couple years. It's always been **worth it** to make the time to meet with them even **once a month** and **reflect** on what God is doing in my life and theirs. We **pray**. We **encourage** each other. We **seek** God together. If you get someone to **disciple** you, you may be **surprised** by what **God does**. **Pastor Andrew** was the **first person to encourage** me to go to **seminary** and become a **pastor**. *We all need a spiritual father or spiritual mother to help us find the way of wisdom.*

*Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon, which includes endnotes and references. Read our story here.*

<sup>1</sup> **Ephesians 6:4** Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (NIV)