



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Win the Day!

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**Hear, my son, and accept my sayings,
And the years of your life will be many.
I have directed you in the way of wisdom;
I have led you in upright paths. (Proverbs 4: 10-11)**

I think it's helpful to stop and think about that statement, I have led you. This is the imagery of a father saying to his son, "I haven't just talked about skillful living. I have lived skillfully before you, and I am inviting you to follow my lead." There is this reminder of the sobering reality of actually living that out before your children as a parent. I think for us who are parents, the goal should be to be able to lay out every area of our lives, both private and public, and say to our children, "Here it is and I'm inviting you to follow my lead and live skillfully." It would be equally true with anyone that you're mentoring or discipling or leading. The idea is that you are demonstrating for them how to live out these great truths from God skillfully, in a very confusing world, in such a way that they can follow. If there's anything in your life, publicly or privately, that prevents you from laying it all out in front of somebody else and saying, "Hey check it out; I'm inviting you to follow my lead," then *deal* with it! That's a really helpful way to think about it. Whatever it is that would prohibit you from doing that—*Deal with it*, in order that you might live skillfully and then teach others to live skillfully as well. 19:58

I consistently struggle in our culture with the concept of Christian celebrities. I just don't quite know what to do with that concept. I'm not sure God really ever intended that that's the way it would be within His church. I understand that God has used godly teachers on the radio, on television and the internet, and authors to change people's lives and to reach people all around the world. I get that...I think that's great! So maybe the best way to say it is that I still think that your primary teachers, your primary mentors and disciplers should be local. In other words, they should be people that have a level of accountability to you. I could tell you stories of well-known Christian celebrities and how they live their lives in private would gravely disappoint and dismay you. I think there's value in the person that you're listening to actually being accountable to you in terms of how that person lives out his or her life.

For me as a preacher, I'm aware of the fact that again and again when I talk about my level of passion and commitment for Patti, that every time I do that there are three girls who are now adults that sit in these seats and know the truth. And either over the years, they will become deeply cynical because I say one thing and I live another, or they will respect my words because they know what actually goes on behind closed doors. I'm aware of the fact that every time I talk about leadership and how we should treat people, there are roughly a hundred employees who sit in these seats and over the years they've either become cynical because of the hypocrisy of the leadership that says one thing and lives another, or they respect these words because it's practiced both on the stage and throughout the week. There's a high level of accountability in that. I think that's good. I think that's the way it should be.

So, one of the ways to process this is that you need to think about: *Who are the voices I listen to?* And you need to start by thinking: *What kind of a life do I want? What kind of a marriage do I want? What kind of a parent do I want to be? What kind of a business owner do I want to be? What kind of a life do I really want before God?* And then find those people who are actually living that way. Learn from them. Listen to them. Allow them to speak into your life. Solomon is saying to his son that if you want to live this way, follow my lead. There's a lot of sobering reality to that.

He says in verse 12:

**When you walk, your steps will not be impeded;
And if you run, you will not stumble.
Take 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 proceed in the way of evil men.
Avoid it, do not pass by it;
Turn away from it and pass on.
For they cannot sleep unless they do evil;
And they are robbed of sleep unless they make someone stumble.
For they eat the bread of wickedness
And drink the wine of violence. (Vs. 12-17)**

You have this very familiar imagery of two paths: the path of the righteous and the path of the wicked. I do think it's interesting in verse 14 that he talks about not lingering around the entrance to the path. Basically, it's the idea that I really shouldn't linger around the entrance of the path but be diligently moving down the path of righteousness. In other words, I'm not looking down the path; I'm not flirting with that path. One of the things I've learned for myself, and I've seen over the years again and again, is that most sin and temptation is relatively easy to manage as long as you don't *start* down the path. Once you start down the path, once you start to flirt with it, once you start to experience it, once you indulge in it, you may find that for the rest of your life it becomes a battle for you. The way to effectively deal with sin and temptation is to not even flirt with it, which is the idea of staying off the entrance to the path.

It would be my observation that as a reaction to the fundamentalism that many of us grew up with, that in some ways the pendulum has swung too far under the umbrella of liberty—where the idea is now I have so much liberty in Christ I am free to get as close to the world as possible without stepping over the line. It's much like a high school couple that decides to get physically involved and they draw a line and say, "We'll only go that far!" But that gives them freedom to go right up to the line every time. It's only a matter of time until that line is crossed, and they go further. It's the same idea that, "*I'm seeing how close to the world I can get without slipping over the line.*" In my opinion, that mindset is very different from someone who has a passion for righteousness—that my commitment is the path of righteousness. "*That's the path I'm going to travel. I don't want to hover around the entrance to the other path. I don't want to look down it. I don't want to flirt with it. I want to be passionate about doing righteousness.*"

The other thing I want to comment on is the usage of the term "wicked". You see it in verse 14. We saw this in Amos; we've seen it in the Psalms, and we've seen it before in Proverbs. It's very important to understand the terminology. In the poetic literature, there is a contrast between the righteous—the tzedek—and the wicked. Both of those terms have to be translated in a context of community. That's part of the definition of the term. So, righteous—the tzedek—is one who values the community; values us together. And, if necessary, the righteous one will disadvantage himself or herself in order to better advantage the community.

The contrast of that, then, is the *wicked*. If we define the wicked as murders and rapists and all kinds of nasty people, then we don't see ourselves like that or around those people at all. Biblically defined, the wicked are simply those who are self-absorbed, those who are selfish, those who, day in and day out, will disadvantage the community (others) in order to advantage himself or herself. I would say that describes the overwhelming majority of people in a community these days. The idea is, they live for themselves. That's what they eat; that's what they dream about. They can't even sleep because they're so caught up in their own selfish self-absorption. That's their life; it's their diet; it's everything about them. That's basically what the proverb just said. And that's the danger of going down that path.

Verse 18:

**But the path of the righteous— (the tzedek)—is like the light of dawn,
That shines brighter and brighter until the full day.**

Basically, the imagery is: the sun comes up in the morning; there's light, and as you go farther into the day, the sun rises and gets brighter and brighter and brighter, basically saying the more I travel down the path of righteousness, the lighter it becomes. The more I understand it, the more energy I get, the more vigorously I travel down the path. It isn't always going to be the struggle that it may feel like it is today.

Verse 19:

**The way of the wicked is like darkness;
They do not know over what they stumble.**

The idea is, they become so selfish, so self-absorbed, so lost in their own world that every day they stumble over themselves. They make a mess of things and they don't even realize it. They don't even realize what they're stumbling over anymore.

Verse 20 then starts the third discussion:

**My son, give attention to my words;
Incline your ear to my sayings.
Do not let them depart from your sight;
Keep them in the midst of your heart.
For they are life to those who find them
And health to all their body. (Vs. 20-22)**

Again, in verse 22 we find the emphasis on life. But it's interesting that there's also emphasis on health. I don't think this is metaphoric; I think it's literal. It's saying that if you learn to live your life with a high degree of skill, it actually affects your physical health. If you choose to live a selfish, self-absorbed, unskillful, foolish life, it actually affects your physical health. More and more science are affirming this to be true, that our health is affected by every part—our emotion, our mental—and all of that is spiritual. It all comes together to affect our health.

Verse 23:

**Watch over your heart with all diligence,
For from it flow the springs of life.**

When we think of heart, we think primarily of emotion. The Hebrew idea is that it's the center of your being. It's far more than emotion. It's your intellect, your mind, your emotion, your will; it's the core of your being. It's the idea that life is basically lived from the inside out. You can't just manage behaviors. At the end of the day, it's what's inside that determines how you will live out your life. Therefore, the emphasis is on guarding the inside, because that will ultimately determine the outside which, again, includes your physical health.

Right now, in our culture, it's very trendy to be very aware of what you eat—literally what you put in your mouth—to be aware of the source. Is it organic? How is it grown? I think that's fine. I think everyone needs to decide what's best for you. It may be helpful just to remind ourselves that just because *you* see it a certain way doesn't mean *everyone* has to see it that way. We don't need one more thing to get legalistic about! But I would say this: I do believe, according to the text, it is saying that your physical health will be more affected if you're more cautious about what you put in your heart than what you put in your mouth. At the end of the day, what is going to affect even your physical health is affected more by what you put in your heart than just what you put in your mouth. He goes on: How do we guard our hearts...watch our hearts?

Verse 24:

**Put away from you a deceitful mouth
And put devious speech far from you.**

So, it starts with your mouth. We are people of integrity—people of truth. We're not about lies and deceit and sneaking around. What comes out of our mouth is right and true.

Second of all, verse 25:

**Let your eyes look directly ahead
And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you.**

It's the imagery that we're not longing down the path of wickedness, that we're not longing to travel a different path. It's the idea that my eyes look at is what I long for. So how do we guard our hearts? First of all, it's about our mouth, and being people of integrity and truth. Second of all, it's what I long for—what I actually want out of life.

And thirdly, verse 26:

**Watch the path of your feet
And all your ways will be established.
Do not turn to the right nor to the left;
Turn your foot from evil. (Vs. 26-27)**

What path do I travel down? So, how do I guard my heart in real, practical terms? It has to do with what comes out of my mouth. It has to do with what I long for with my eyes. And it has to do with what path I travel with my feet.

Now again, the emphasis of Proverbs chapter 4 is not getting into the details of this wisdom, but rather wisdom starts with *wanting* wisdom—passionately desiring wisdom—like one would passionately desire a lover. Then I seek after wisdom in order to live skillfully. Basically, the idea of the proverb is this: I

start by looking for someone who is living out the life that I think God wants us to live, someone who is modeling that. And when I find that person, I listen to that person; I learn from that person. How have you taken these truths of God and lived it out in life? How can I follow you that I might live that way, in order that I might be more skillful at living, in order that I might turn around to the next generation and be able to say to them, "If you want to know how to take these great truths of God and live them out skillfully in ordinary, everyday life, just follow me," in order that generation after generation we would raise up children of God who understand how to live this one life with a high degree of skill—that we might fulfill the purpose for which we were created.

Well, here we are. It's Monday back in Proverbs chapter 4. One of the things I wanted to comment on is (I mentioned in the message) that I think your primary Bible teachers should be local. It may seem like an odd thing for radio Bible teacher to be saying, but I still think that's true. I'm a local church pastor. There's a lot of accountability in a local church and I really think our primary teachers should be local. We should see how they live. We should see how they treat their spouse, how they raise their kids, how they spend their money. I think there's good accountability in that, and I think that's an important thing in who you choose to follow. We've talked about what life do you want. Then find somebody that lives that life and follow their example. So that all fits there.

Also, in Proverbs 4 you have the message about temptation — that if you're serious about walking uprightly, you need to stay away from the entrance to the path of destruction. There's nothing to gain by messing around close to the entrance of the path of the fools. The goal is not to see how close to the line of the world we can get without going over it, but rather to be driven by a true passion for righteousness.

One of the things we talked about in Proverbs 4 is the wicked, and we always have to come back and remind ourselves the definition of wicked is not like a killer or a gangster. If we think it's that, then everybody thinks, well, that's not me. It's primarily about being selfish. It's about being self-centered. It's about a willingness to disadvantage others, to advantage myself. When we define wicked that way, it applies to many of us.

The proverb also talks about the righteous and the more they travel down the path of righteousness, the more light it becomes. Equally true for the wicked. The more they travel down the path of darkness, the darker it becomes. It's just a way of saying that as I travel down the path, I get more entrenched in the path and it's harder to change. That's why it's really important to face into some of these things and make necessary changes *now*.

One of the things I mentioned early on is this holistic idea that all these different themes fit together. This is a good example with the Proverbs talking about physical health, but it's also talking about how the spiritual dramatically affects our physical health. I know a lot of people are worried today about what they eat and that's fine, but what the proverb is saying is if you don't worry about what's in your heart, it's going to dramatically affect your health. And so, we have to realize when I'm spiritually healthy, it's also going to help me be more physically healthy.