

THE LIFE CYCLE OF WISDOM

PROVERBS 4:1-27

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

M.I. LIFE CAN ONLY BE LIVED TO ITS FULLEST WHEN WE LIVE ACCORDING TO GOD'S WISDOM. WE ARE RESPONSIBLE TO LEARN GOD'S WISDOM, LIVE GOD'S WISDOM, AND PASS ON GOD'S WISDOM.

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Chapters 1-9 of Proverbs deal with the nature of wisdom. Although they may seem very similar, each chapter builds on the theme of wisdom and then adds something unique to its description. For example, last week we saw that God is the source of all wisdom but in chapter 4, God is not mentioned at all, however, carrying forward our study of wisdom in chapter 4, we must remember that wisdom comes from God.

It would also be appropriate for us to define what the definition of wisdom is to the poet. Wisdom is the ability to take God's word and apply it to every day living. For the poet, it was the first five books of the Bible, the Torah. For us, it is the entire Bible from Genesis through Revelation. Wisdom for us would be the ability to live out our everyday lives according to biblical principles.

The unique perspective that chapter 4 adds to our study of wisdom is how wisdom is transmitted, learned, lived, and then passed on. In order to pass on our wisdom, we must first receive it, understand it, and then live it.

An example of this is: I am an only child so I could never have gained this type of knowledge had I not taught children's Sunday school, but those of you who have brothers and sisters will easily understand this bit of wisdom. One day, I was teaching a Sunday school lesson on sharing I turned to 8-year-old Tommy and said, "Tommy, if you had a big apple and a little apple, which one would you give to your brother?" Tommy thought for a moment and asked, "Do you mean my big brother or my little brother?" Now that's wisdom I had to learn from an eight-

year-old because I have no experience in that area. I don't understand the experience of sharing since I am an only child.

You see there are rules about wisdom. There is a life cycle of wisdom. There must be a teacher who imparts wisdom, a student who receives it, and not only receives it, but also lives it and then passes it on. That's the life cycle of wisdom. The main idea of this chapter is: **LIFE CAN ONLY BE LIVED TO ITS FULLEST WHEN WE LIVE ACCORDING TO GOD'S WISDOM. WE ARE RESPONSIBLE TO LEARN GOD'S WISDOM, LIVE GOD'S WISDOM, AND PASS ON GOD'S WISDOM.**

This chapter is broken down into three parts. Each part begins with the teacher addressing the student. In verse 1 the teacher addresses the students as a class. In verse 10 the teacher addresses a student as an individual. And in verse 20 the teacher lays out the life of wisdom to a student.

I. THE SOURCE OF WISDOM (vs. 1-9)

EACH GENERATION IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PASSING ON GOD'S WISDOM. WE ARE NOT TO CONTROL OUR STUDENTS AND CHILDREN, BUT MERELY INFLUENCE THEM.

In verses 1-9 we are introduced to the source of wisdom. In other words, **EACH GENERATION IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PASSING ON GOD'S WISDOM. WE ARE NOT TO CONTROL OUR STUDENTS AND CHILDREN, BUT MERELY INFLUENCE THEM.** A lot of parents think that their duty is to control the way their children think and act but the Bible's description of good parents and teachers is: people who love their children and try to influence them towards God's ways, each person must personally choose to follow God or reject God.

A. THE TRANSMISSION OF THE LEGACY (1-4a)

The transmission of the legacy of wisdom is described in verse 1 through the first half of verse 4. In this chapter, we will again see the words, walk, path, and way used. The Christian life is a life-long journey. Learning to live life the way God designed it is a life-long process.

In verses 1-2 an interesting change takes place. Up until now, it seems as if a parent has been addressing his child or a teacher his individual student, however, here the word son or child appears in the plural. The father or teacher is now addressing his children or students as a group. He asks the students to pay attention and learn valuable information concerning how wisdom is gained and passed on. Since this wisdom ultimately comes from God, the students are encouraged to take the lessons seriously and act upon them.

In verse 3 the teacher instructs the students in how he came to know wisdom. Now please do not miss this. The teacher is addressing his students as a class and now describes the beginnings of his journey towards wisdom as a one to one, intimate experience with his teacher or father. It is the very intimate setting of a home where he is the only child. He was young and had the full attention of his mother and father. This is a very important concept for parents to grasp. It does not matter how many children you have. It is imperative to spend time with them one on one. Each child should feel special and each child should be engaged according to his or her individual personality and learning style. Sometimes it is appropriate to teach in a group setting and sometimes it is appropriate to teach in a one to one setting. Parents, take time to spend with each of your children, one on one. That is how the lesson starts out in the first half of verse 4.

The teacher's father taught him the following lessons concerning wisdom and this legacy, all that we learn about living the Christian life, is to be passed on to our children. I am using the word children like the poet in Proverbs does. We parents are definitely responsible to pass on the love of Jesus and the other lessons we learn about living the Christian life to our biological children,

but as a Christian community we are also responsible to pass this legacy on to the next generation of believers. We are also responsible to disciple new believers. It is each person's responsibility to pass on this legacy of wisdom.

B. THE LEGACY (4b-9)

The legacy is described in the second half of verses 4-9. If you follow the text closely, you will notice that this seems to be taken from a wedding ceremony and it appears that our legacy as believers is that we find ourselves in a relationship with God. We are to embrace wisdom as if we were being married to her.

1. DEDICATION (4b)

The marriage ceremony starts by quoting Genesis 2, which describes marriage as a man leaving his mother and father, dedicating himself to his wife, and becoming one with her sexually. The second half of verse 4 describes this dedication portion; we are to totally dedicate ourselves to wisdom and she in turn will bring us life. Look how strongly the verse is stated. Lay hold of this wisdom. Keep the commandments with all your heart. This is not merely lip service, religious talk, or religious behavior. This is wholehearted commitment to loving God and His Word. When we do, we will find the abundant life. The abundant life doesn't mean we will be rich and prosperous according to the world's standards. What it means is that no matter what circumstances we face in life, we can experience peace with God. That is living. I know what lovers say. They say things like, "As long as we're together, it doesn't matter what happens, we'll be happy." That is what God means by dedication. He dedicated Himself to us in sending Jesus to die for us. We enter that relationship by forsaking all others and dedicating ourselves to Him in love.

2. FAITHFULNESS (5-6)

In wedding vows, we promise to be faithful to one another, to value one another, and to honor one another. Verses 5-6 describe faithfulness. If we are faithful to wisdom, she will be faithful to us. We demonstrate our faithfulness to wisdom by making her the first priority in our lives. We do this by reading, studying, and memorizing Scripture, and then trying to live accordingly. If your faithfulness to God was demonstrated by how much time you spend in the Bible, how faithful would you rate yourself? If our primary goal in life is to get to know God through studying the Scriptures, then wisdom will do her part. We will gain insight into Who God is and Wisdom will protect and watch over us.

3. VALUE (7)

Verse 7 describes wisdom's value. If we value wisdom, she will value us. Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God being more valuable than a precious valuable pearl. He said, in effect for people to sell all we have, if that is what it cost to enter the Kingdom of God. Wisdom from God is supreme. It is more precious and valuable than silver, gold, or platinum. She will give us the right information on how to be in and continue in a right relationship with God and the world.

4. HONOR (8-9)

Verses 8-9 instruct us to honor wisdom. If we honor her, she will honor us. We honor wisdom by valuing her, embracing her, spending time with her. Doesn't that sound like the way we should treat our husbands and wives? If we do spend time pursuing wisdom, she will honor us by delivering us through difficult circumstances. We will be victorious over sin and life's problems. Even as we journey through the deserts of life, we will find peace, joy, and love since wisdom is our partner and guide.

Let me ask a question. Do we treat our relationship with God and His Word as a marriage? In other words, if our husbands or wives, parents or children, boyfriends or girlfriends paid

attention to us the way we pay attention to God and His word, would we be satisfied with that level of love? If not, then we have not dedicated ourselves to wisdom.

If we are expected to pass on this legacy of faith, the one requirement is that we have understood and have lived it and if we have not, then we have nothing to pass on. The point is that **EACH GENERATION IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PASSING ON GOD’S WISDOM. WE ARE NOT TO CONTROL OUR STUDENTS AND CHILDREN, BUT MERELY INFLUENCE THEM.** We do this best by honestly living out our legacy of faith in front of them.

II. THE PURPOSE OF WISDOM (vs. 10-19)

EACH STUDENT MUST RECOGNIZE THE ONLY TWO CHOICES IN LIFE AND THEN MAKE A PERSONAL CHOICE.

So the source of wisdom is ultimately God as He speaks through the Scriptures. And then the legacy of faith is handed down from one generation to the next. Verses 10-19 go on to lay out the purpose of wisdom: **EACH STUDENT MUST RECOGNIZE THE ONLY TWO CHOICES IN LIFE AND THEN MAKE A PERSONAL CHOICE.** We do not get wise by accident. Becoming wise takes a conscious choice on our part.

A. THE LEARNER’S RESPONSIBILITY TO CHOOSE (10)

Verse 10 makes clear the learner’s responsibility to choose. Look at the word son or child; it is again in the singular. The teacher or parent is now taking time to instruct the student one on one. The student is getting private, individual attention here, and for good reason. The child will have to make a choice. It is not enough for us to hear that Jesus died for our sins. It is not enough for us to agree with the Bible. It is imperative that we make a personal, conscious commitment to be in a personal, intimate, relationship with God. It is imperative that we commit ourselves to Him, as if, we were a bride pledging our love, faithfulness, and commitment to God as our husband. That is from our perspective as the learner.

However, do we ever take time to think about what an awesome responsibility the teacher or parent has? The older I get, the more reluctant I am to give advice. If I am giving good advice to my children or to any of you, then the results can lead to a life that produces both quality and quantity. However, if what I am teaching is wrong, then that can lead to a life filled with misery and as parents and teachers, this is a sobering thought.

At any rate, when wisdom is presented to us, we must all make a choice to accept it, act on it, or reject it. That is the nature of our relationship with God. He presents Himself to us in Jesus. We are then presented with the choice to give our lives to Him, or reject Him. Receiving Jesus into our lives is the act that puts us on the way of our spiritual journey.

B. A GOOD CHOICE (11-13)

A good choice is described in verses 11-13. First of all, I want to remind all of us as parents, leaders, and teachers what an awesome responsibility we have. Look at the claim of this mentor. He says, "I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths." If we connect this with all that was said about wisdom in the first 3 chapters of Proverbs, this mentor is claiming to speak for God. If you are a Sunday school teacher, can you claim the authority of God in what you are teaching the children or adults? If children were accepting the message you are teaching on Sunday morning as authoritative, would you feel comfortable throwing a lesson together on Saturday night? As we have seen in the first 10 verses, this wisdom teacher has been pursuing wisdom his whole life, from the time he was a child to the present. It is a good and noble thing to aspire to be a leader, a mentor, and a teacher, but in order to fulfill that responsibility one must live a life dedicated to pursuing, understanding, and living out God's wisdom. Too many parents, teachers, and leaders are teaching their children and students their own agenda, not God's wisdom. Let me repeat the wisdom teacher's claim, "I will guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you

along straight paths.” If we do not know the answer, it is better to say, “I don’t know,” rather than make up an answer so we can look good. It is our job as leaders of any kind to know God’s Word and be living it out in our lives.

Verse 12 describes the life of one who follows wisdom. Now keep in mind, the walk, the path, and the way all refer to our journey of faith, not necessarily the things we chase after in life. As we pursue holiness, as we pursue our relationship with Jesus, nothing can stop us if we keep our eyes fixed on the truth. As we are deeply loved by God, we will all have to be confronted by wilderness experiences. That is where God gets rid of all our false ideas and prepares us to continue on our journeys. We will continue to walk and run the journey of faith and not be hampered or stumble as we walk hand in hand with wisdom.

That brings us to the good choice. It is easy to get distracted by the things of this world -- success, power, money, and relationships. It is easy to become distracted and lose sight of our goal when things are going well, but it is just as easy to get distracted and lose sight of God’s presence in the bad times. The Evil One wants us to believe that God has forgotten or forsaken us. That is why, whether in good times or bad, we must continually make this good choice described in verse 13. We are to hold on to and guard wisdom. Look at the powerful wording. We are to hold on to it for everything we are worth and even though the world and Satan want to rip it from our hands, we are not to let it go. If you have ever played football or watched it, you will notice that everyone that tackles the ball carrier is trying to bat the ball loose by swinging at and hitting the ball carrier’s arms. But, a good ball carrier covers the ball with both his arms and keeps running forward while hanging on to the ball for dear life. That is the picture here. We are to run forward like a football player being very careful not to drop the ball of wisdom. In a football game, a fumble can result in a loss of the game but the stakes are much higher in life. If we do not guard wisdom and hold on to

it, it could mean the ruination of our lives. The good choice we have before us this morning is that we will commit ourselves to reading, studying, and memorizing God's Word, the Bible and then we will commit ourselves to obeying God and following Him in faith. That will bring us the abundant life that God promises, unlike a bad choice found in verses 14-17.

B. A BAD CHOICE (14-17)

In verse 14 we find another mentor, another teacher. Only this teacher is not teaching God's wisdom he is teaching the world's wisdom. This teacher teaches evil and sets us on a journey of destruction whose end is death. Wisdom leads to life and worldly pleasure leads to death. Being filled with the Holy Spirit leads us to an abundant life and being filled with the things of this world leads to death. Allowing the Holy Spirit to control our thoughts and behaviors will lead to a good, full, joyful life. Being controlled by lust, sex, greed, drugs, alcohol, power, money or anything of this world will lead to a miserable life and even more, it will lead to a miserable death.

Look how serious the wisdom teacher takes this in verse 15. He says avoid that stuff at all cost, do not even look at it or consider it. Turn away from it. Continue on the faith journey that God has prepared for you.

Why? Because we cannot begin to imagine how evil Satan and the world really are. Their intent is to lure us away from God, steal our joy and hope, and kill us. Jesus said that Satan is a thief and his intent is to steal, kill, and destroy. Look at verse 17. These thieves are robbed of sleep unless they can do evil by making someone fall. That is pretty ironic, isn't it? Thieves are being robbed of their sleep. Did you ever have something so important on your mind that you could not go to sleep? That is how evil people are -- only what is on their mind is how to destroy your life and mine. If people offer you drugs, know that they are evil and their intent is to kill you.

If someone is trying to have sex with you, know that he or she is evil and the intent is to kill you. If people want to involve you in gossip, know that their intent is to kill you. If anyone is trying to convince you of anything that is against the Bible, know that the intent is to kill you. Do you think that is an exaggeration? Look at verse 17.

When I used to play sports, the coaches would say, “For the next 3 months you are going to think about nothing except baseball. You will eat baseball, drink baseball, and sleep baseball.” By that he meant that we would dedicate ourselves to practicing baseball, it would dominate our lives for the season. Here these evil people eat, drink, and sleep evil. I wish I could make all of us see how intent Satan is on destroying each one of us here. If you are a Christian, then you are on the way to heaven via a direct route. Satan, his demons, and the world have dedicated themselves wholly to getting us to venture off the track. I do not think he can lure us so far off the track that we lose our salvation, although there is Scripture that may indicate he can, and he can certainly lead us down paths through our wrong thinking and wrong behavior that can make this life thoroughly miserable leaving us spiritual babies for all our lives.

D. Its TIME FOR US TO CHOOSE (18-19)

A good choice brings life a bad choice brings death. Now it’s time for each one of us to step up and make a choice. Verses 18-19 notify us that it’s time for us to choose. Verse 18 recaps what we said about a life that is dedicated to learning and living God’s wisdom. No matter what circumstances this life throws at us, there will always be a light at the end of the tunnel because God’s wisdom leads us towards light and life. On the other hand, to neglect God’s wisdom leads to darkness and confusion. The moral of this section is that if you play with fire, you will get burned. My prayer for all of us here this morning is that we will make a wise choice and follow God’s

wisdom. **EACH STUDENT MUST RECOGNIZE THE ONLY TWO CHOICES IN LIFE AND THEN MAKE A PERSONAL CHOICE.**

Think about the cycle of wisdom so far. The ultimate source of wisdom is God and this wisdom is passed generation after generation by wise mentors. The purpose of wisdom is to instruct us to maximize our living both in quantity and quality.

III. THE LIFE OF WISDOM (vs. 20-27)

LIVING WISELY IS THE ONLY THING THAT BRINGS LASTING ENJOYMENT TO LIFE. BUT LIVING WISELY MEANS SURRENDERING OUR WHOLE LIVES TO THE LEADING OF GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT.

And finally, verses 20-27 demonstrate for us the life of wisdom. **LIVING WISELY IS THE ONLY THING THAT BRINGS LASTING ENJOYMENT TO LIFE. BUT LIVING WISELY MEANS SURRENDERING OUR WHOLE LIVES TO THE LEADING OF GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT.** Jesus said that we are to love God with all our hearts, minds, souls, and strength. Further He said that we should dedicate ourselves to this end. Figuratively speaking he said that if any part of our bodies prevented us from achieving this goal, we should cut it off. In these verses, the wisdom teacher will teach us how to love God with our whole being.

A. IN OUR EARS (20-21a)

In verse 20 and the first half of verse 21 we are instructed to love God with our ears. Again, if the teacher presumes to speak for God we are commanded to pay attention to God's word and to listen closely to what is said. I do not know if you are like me, but I'm not so sure my ears are tuned to God's frequency. But if I hear a dirty joke, or something that is inappropriately funny I am all ears. But I want that to change. I want to have my ears, both physical ears and spiritual ears, ready to hear God speak to me through the Bible, through Christian radio, through Christian music,

through Bible lessons and sermons. I want to quiet myself in prayer and anticipate His speaking to me. I want my ears tuned to God's frequency, not the worlds.

B. IN OUR HEART (21b-23)

The second half of verse 21 through verse 23 instructs us to keep wisdom in our hearts. This seems to be the center of all we say, think, and do. Jesus said that it is out of the heart that evil comes. It is also the place where good is formulated. Have you fallen in love with God yet? It is the overflow of this love that motivates us to think and do good. Verse 22 tells us that as God's Word sinks deep into our hearts, we find true health and we are to guard our hearts for it is the wellspring of life.

C. IN OUR MOUTHS (24)

We are to fill our ears and hearts with God's wisdom. If this is the case then verse 24 should follow naturally. God's wisdom should be in our mouths. James, the brother of Jesus, said that if our hearts belong to Jesus then our mouths should speak only of good. It is not right that the same mouth we use to praise God should be used to curse God and hurt people. If we are Christians and our hearts belong to God, then what comes out of our mouths should demonstrate to whom our hearts belong.

This is a very good exercise: Evaluate what comes out of your mouth for a couple of days. If Jesus were to judge you simply by what came out of your mouth whom would He say your heart belongs to? Remember our mouths were meant to praise God and heal people.

D. IN OUR EYES (25)

Verse 25 is an appropriate warning for us today. God's wisdom should be in our eyes. The world teaches us to look at one another as sexual objects. We have been taught to look at beauty in terms of physical looks. Astounding numbers of people are hooked on pornography it is a multi-million

dollar industry. Do you judge people by their physical looks or by the way they dress? This crosses all age and gender lines. Guard your eyes and be careful how you evaluate beauty. Satan wants to get us on the wrong track. He wants to lead us to misery and death.

E. IN OUR WILLS (26-27)

Verses 26-27 remind us that the pursuit of wisdom is a day-by-day, moment-by-moment, life-long pursuit. Wisdom must be lived out in our wills. It is not enough to know the truth we must also dedicate ourselves to living the truth. It is a conscious decision to stay on course. I know many of you do not like to memorize Scripture but here is what I have done to help myself stay on course: I made a card for myself of these 8 verses, Proverbs 4:20-27. I laminated the card and always keep it with me. I want to memorize it because it is an exercise of my will to pursue God's wisdom. Wisdom is meant to be lived and not simply studied or believed. Too many modern day Christians have turned Christianity into reading the latest book, reading and studying are necessary however, wisdom is short-circuited unless it is lived out. We must keep wisdom in our ears, in our hearts, in our mouths, in our eyes, and in our wills. **LIVING WISELY IS THE ONLY THING THAT BRINGS LASTING ENJOYMENT TO LIFE. BUT LIVING WISELY MEANS SURRENDERING OUR WHOLE LIVES TO THE LEADING OF GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT,** and then the cycle should start all over again. As we live lives of wisdom, we should become mentors to others and help them find the joy and freedom that comes from living lives of wisdom. What a tremendous cycle of life. Wisdom's life cycle is ongoing and never-ending.

I wish there were some way I could convince everyone here that God wants us to enjoy life to the fullest. Even in the midst of the most difficult and trying experiences, even in the valley of the shadow of death, God wants us to live life and live it to the fullest. **BUT LIFE CAN ONLY BE LIVED TO ITS FULLEST WHEN WE LIVE ACCORDING TO GOD'S WISDOM. WE**

ARE RESPONSIBLE TO LEARN GOD’S WISDOM, LIVE GOD’S WISDOM, AND PASS ON GOD’S WISDOM.

What is the problem with our society and with the church today? We adults do not have wisdom because we do not know our Bibles. Many church leaders have never read the whole Bible. How can that be? Especially since the Apostle Paul tells us that Scripture is inspired by God? The other problem is a direct result of not knowing Scripture. We do not have a clue as to what is important and what is not.

This story should make us stop and think.

“It was a 99-degree September day in San Antonio, Texas when her aunt accidentally locked a 10-month-old baby girl inside a parked car. Frantically the mother and aunt ran around the auto in near hysteria, while a neighbor attempted to unlock the car with a clothes hanger. Soon the infant was turning purple and had foam on her mouth. It had become a life-or-death situation when Fred Arriola, a wrecker driver, arrived on the scene. He grabbed a hammer and smashed the back window of the car to set her free. Was he heralded a hero? No! “The lady was mad at me because I broke the window,” Arriola reported. “I just thought, ‘what’s more important – the baby or the window?’” Most questions of priority are not between something important and something trivial but rather between the important and the most important.

The only way to understand life and to live it to the full is by understanding God’s Word, -- all of it -- and then applying it to and in our everyday lives.