

Wisdom for the World (# 4) Proverbs 4



Studies in Proverbs prepared by Dr. Bob Bernhardt (RobertBernhardt.com)
Based on the Contemporary English Version of the Bible (provided)

"From these (Proverbs), an ordinary person can learn to be smart, and young people can gain knowledge and good sense." (Proverbs 1:4)

An Introduction to Chapter four of Proverbs:

As I suspect you can see as we progress through Proverbs the material has a sort of repetitive pattern to it. This is not intended as a criticism. Perhaps it is more the recognition that this material was not recorded with the expectation that people would read through it as a book but that they would sample the thoughts and apply the ones that fit to life as it was being experienced at the moment.

This series is just an introduction to Proverbs and it is not our intention to go through all 31 chapters of it. In fact, this will be the final chapter that we look at in detail at this time. We will conclude our brief introduction next week by looking at the important question of how the figure of "Wisdom" in Proverbs relates to Jesus Christ. Our primary purpose in this brief introduction to Proverbs is to explore some of underlying principles that characterize "wisdom".

The text provided here is the Contemporary English Version, released by the American Bible Society in 1995.

Proverbs 4

Advice to Young People

¹My child, listen closely to my teachings and learn common sense. ²My advice is useful, so don't turn away. ³When I was still very young and my mother's favorite child, my father ⁴said to me: "If you follow my teachings and keep them in mind, you will live. ⁵Be wise and learn good sense; remember my teachings and do what I say. ⁶If you love Wisdom and don't reject her, she will watch over you. ⁷The best thing about Wisdom is Wisdom herself; good sense is more important than anything else. ⁸If you value Wisdom and hold tightly to her, great honors will be yours. ⁹It will be like wearing a glorious crown of beautiful flowers.

The Right Way and the Wrong Way

¹⁰My child, if you listen and obey my teachings, you will live a long time. ¹¹I have shown you the way that makes sense I have guided you along the right path. ¹²Your road won't be blocked, and you won't stumble when you run. ¹³Hold firmly to my teaching and never let go. It will mean life for you. ¹⁴Don't follow the bad example of cruel and evil people. ¹⁵Turn aside and keep going. Stay away from them. ¹⁶They can't sleep or rest until they do wrong or harm some innocent victim. ¹⁷Their food and drink are violence and cruelty. ¹⁸The lifestyle of good people is like sunlight at dawn that keeps getting brighter until broad daylight. ¹⁹The lifestyle of the wicked is like total darkness, and they will never know what makes them stumble. ²⁰My child, listen carefully to everything I say. ²¹Don't forget a single word, but think about it all. ²²Knowing these teachings will mean true life and good health for you. ²³Carefully guard your thoughts because they are the source of true life. ²⁴Never tell lies or be deceitful in what you say. ²⁵Keep looking straight ahead, without turning aside. ²⁶Know where you are headed, and you will stay on solid ground. ²⁷Don't make a mistake by turning to the right or the left.

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Proverbs, Chapter 4. Notes on the Text.

4:4 The phrase "with all your heart" occurs frequently in Scripture. It occurs 22 times in the OT and 8 times in the NT. In the NT it is applied to loving God (Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, and Luke 10:27) and also to believing in the resurrection (Romans 10:9) and praising God (Ephesians 5:19).

4:22,23 "true life". See also Proverbs 19:23. In the CEV this phrase is also used 3 times in the NT (John 20:31, I Timothy 6:19 and Hebrews 12:9).

Proverbs, "prosperity", and the Hebrew concept of Shalom:

In our discussion of Proverbs 3 the question was raised as to whether the fruit of wisdom described in Proverbs was related to the Hebrew concept of Shalom. On checking the Hebrew text it was noted that the Hebrew word "shalom", though not common to Proverbs, does appear twice in the chapter 3 (3:2 and 3:17).

Applying the wisdom of Proverbs to our lives in today's world.

Proverbs is about how to live life wisely. Our world is full of voices that advise us how to get the most out of life. Today I am going to offer you a few more of those observations representing differing perspectives. You are invited to assess these observations in the light of what you are learning from Proverbs. Always look for the key idea that would make these quotations similar to or different from the basic message of proverbs.

1) A quotation by someone whose name is known to almost everyone.

"Your time is limited, don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma, which is living the result of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinion drown your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition, they somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary."

2) The following is from the website of someone who provides "Personal Development Training".

What would you say? What is the single most important lesson you have learned in your life? The single most important lesson I've ever learned is this... "Have faith that your efforts will be rewarded." That's it. Now that may sound like a productivity lesson, but to me it's really a recipe for happiness and success.

Have faith in **meritocracy**, that your efforts will be rewarded

Have faith in **people**, that your efforts will be rewarded

Have faith in **justice**, that your efforts will be rewarded

Have faith in **karma**, that your efforts will be rewarded

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3. The following is from the website of a philosophical blogger.

Too often, and to their detriment, people mistake knowledge, intelligence, and experience, for wisdom. Wisdom is truth; it is reality, the recognition, acceptance, and living by, and of, what *is*. It is *non-ego*-based. People think that the 'smarter' (the more 'knowledge') they get, the wiser they get, but these are not the same, nor are they even necessarily connected or related. In fact, the smarter people get, often the harder it becomes for them to access wisdom, for they become arrogant and cocky. Wisdom has nothing to do with intelligence or trivia ('knowledge'), and everything to do with openness, courage, compassion, and love. Wisdom is not developed, it is (re-)discovered, it is uncovered, and revealed. We all have wisdom, and it is we who keep ourselves from recognizing and living it.

4. How does this comment relate to Proverbs?

I want to be clear. There are many people with both youth and intelligence. Wisdom is something different. Wisdom and youth will never be had together. Experience is the catalyst for wisdom and therefore youth has no acquired wisdom. Wisdom is what happens when intelligence and experience get together. Wisdom occurs as we age.

Now there are young people in this day and age who have had life altering experiences and thus have gained a certain amount of wisdom. The wisdom of youth differs from the wisdom of age in that there is no repetitive experience to build on. Older people have experience ground into their souls through time. That's when the light bulb goes on and stays lit.

Thoughts to carry around with you.

If someone asked you, "What is Proverbs all about?" Could you give them a brief answer? What would be the key elements in what you would want to tell them?