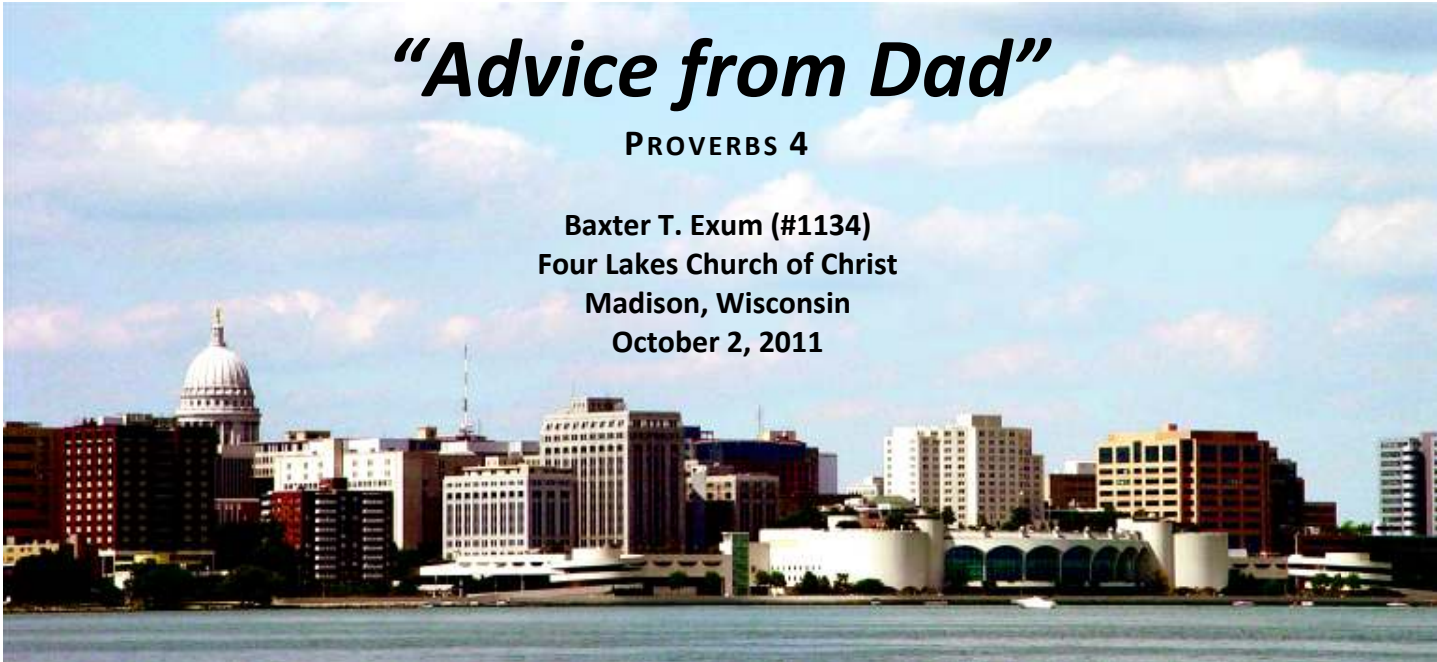


# ***“Advice from Dad”***

## **PROVERBS 4**

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Madison, Wisconsin  
October 2, 2011**



Most of us would probably agree that this life is full of warnings and little bits of advice that are meant to keep us safe. In fact, I would suggest that we cannot drive within just a few feet of this building without running across some kind of warning. Right here on Acewood Boulevard, we have speed limit signs, and stop signs, and giant black and yellow arrows warning us about curves in the road. We look around us, and we see warnings that are more humorous in nature. We look for example, at some of those warnings that seem to be unnecessary, but then we realize that the warning is there for a reason.

- Apparently, someone somewhere did something very un-smart and brought a lawsuit against the company, and so the lawyers now need to warn us that we are not to iron a shirt while wearing it!
- And that attitude, of course, leads to dozens of other similar signs. Do not hold the wrong end of the chainsaw. Well, we would hope that most people could figure that out, but then again, maybe not.
- Or then we have the prescription for a dog, “May cause drowsiness. Alcohol may intensify this effect. Use care when operating a car or dangerous machinery.” For a dog!
- Or maybe the warning that the balcony is not on ground level. I have a feeling that the consumption of alcohol might have in some way led to the placing of this particular sign.
- Or the unique sign from this town, with a warning to drive safely, since they have two cemeteries and no hospital.
- There is this warning from our vacation this summer—warning hikers to stay on the trail and to avoid jumping into the waterfalls. You might have noticed on the news this week that an older man from our area was injured at one of these falls along the Black River north of Hurley. Apparently, he ignored the warnings and was injured. As the sign says, “Wading or swimming could end your vacation.”

- Or one of my favorites, “Slow down, the cop hides behind this sign.”

Certainly we look around us, and we see all kinds of warnings, and labels, and signs that are meant to change our behavior. Some are funny, some are serious, but we understand that not paying attention to certain warnings can have some very serious consequences. This is true not only of driving, but also for our Christian faith. As God’s people, we know that God is looking out for us, that God wants what is best for us. And with that in mind, I would invite you to turn with me to some inspired advice on life from a father to his son as it is found in the Old Testament book of Proverbs—Proverbs 4 (p. 1006). As most of us know from our own experience, the Bible not only tells us what to do to be saved, but it also gives us some very practical advice for everyday life. If you look at the heading of this chapter (in the NASB at least), the heading says, “A Father’s Instruction.” In other words, in this chapter we have some fatherly advice, some words of wisdom from a father who has been through it all, to his son who is just getting started in life. These would be some words that will hopefully help his son avoid some of the pitfalls of life, to help him avoid some of the heartache and some of those lessons that his father had perhaps learned the hard way.

The author, of course, is King Solomon, and as we learn from the opening verses of Proverbs 1, the book was written so that Solomon could convey some level of practical wisdom to his children, and by extension, to all of us gathered here this morning, roughly 3,000 years later. And really, as we look at what Solomon wrote, it appears (from verses 3-4) that Solomon was passing along some advice that he got from his own father, King David. If you will then, let’s look together at all 27 verses of Proverbs 4, and then we will go back and pull out several ideas that we can apply to our lives and our situation here in the Madison area in modern times. The words of King Solomon in Proverbs 4,

- <sup>1</sup> ***Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father,  
And give attention that you may gain understanding,***
- <sup>2</sup> ***For I give you sound teaching;  
Do not abandon my instruction.***
- <sup>3</sup> ***When I was a son to my father,  
Tender and the only son in the sight of my mother,***
- <sup>4</sup> ***Then he taught me and said to me,  
“Let your heart hold fast my words;  
Keep my commandments and live;***
- <sup>5</sup> ***Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding!  
Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth.***
- <sup>6</sup> ***“Do not forsake her, and she will guard you;  
Love her, and she will watch over you.***
- <sup>7</sup> ***“The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom;  
And with all your acquiring, get understanding.***
- <sup>8</sup> ***“Prize her, and she will exalt you;  
She will honor you if you embrace her.***
- <sup>9</sup> ***“She will place on your head a garland of grace;  
She will present you with a crown of beauty.”***
- <sup>10</sup> ***Hear, my son, and accept my sayings  
And the years of your life will be many.***
- <sup>11</sup> ***I have directed you in the way of wisdom;  
I have led you in upright paths.***

- <sup>12</sup> *When you walk, your steps will not be impeded;  
And if you run, you will not stumble.*
- <sup>13</sup> *Take hold of instruction; do not let go.  
Guard her, for she is your life.*
- <sup>14</sup> *Do not enter the path of the wicked  
And do not proceed in the way of evil men.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Avoid it, do not pass by it;  
Turn away from it and pass on.*
- <sup>16</sup> *For they cannot sleep unless they do evil;  
And they are robbed of sleep unless they make someone stumble.*
- <sup>17</sup> *For they eat the bread of wickedness  
And drink the wine of violence.*
- <sup>18</sup> *But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,  
That shines brighter and brighter until the full day.*
- <sup>19</sup> *The way of the wicked is like darkness;  
They do not know over what they stumble.*
- <sup>20</sup> *My son, give attention to my words;  
Incline your ear to my sayings.*
- <sup>21</sup> *Do not let them depart from your sight;  
Keep them in the midst of your heart.*
- <sup>22</sup> *For they are life to those who find them  
And health to all their body.*
- <sup>23</sup> *Watch over your heart with all diligence,  
For from it flow the springs of life.*
- <sup>24</sup> *Put away from you a deceitful mouth  
And put devious speech far from you.*
- <sup>25</sup> *Let your eyes look directly ahead  
And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you.*
- <sup>26</sup> *Watch the path of your feet  
And all your ways will be established.*
- <sup>27</sup> *Do not turn to the right nor to the left;  
Turn your foot from evil.*

- I. As we look back at these inspired words of advice from a father to his son, I would like for us to start by noticing (in verses 1-9) that THE SON IS TOLD TO PUT A PRIORITY ON OBTAINING WISDOM.

As we find in verse 5, *“Get wisdom; get insight”* (ESV), or *“Acquire wisdom, acquire understanding”* (NASB). The lesson here is that we must go through life looking for wisdom just as we might go looking for a lost cell phone. Normally, we tear the house apart until we find it. We put a priority on it. We go looking for it. Wisdom doesn’t find us, but we find wisdom. We pursue it. We chase after it.

And we need to understand what wisdom really is. Wisdom is the practical application of knowledge. And this is where we understand that knowledge and wisdom are different. We know that a person can have a lot of knowledge and not be very wise at all. In fact, a person can have a wall full of diplomas and go through life without a bit of common sense. We think about the highly educated college professor who has no fear of God. That man is not wise according to the Scriptures. That man has missed the main point of life. That man has

failed to apply all of his knowledge to the decisions that he has made in this life. Wisdom, therefore, is knowledge that is applied to our decisions.

And please notice the benefits as King Solomon compares this wisdom to a woman. In verse 6, ***“Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you.”*** And down in verse 8, ***“Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.”*** In verse 9, ***“She will place on your head a graceful garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.”*** Wisdom, then, is something that we must pursue. Wisdom is something that we must go after. And part of this is being curious. Part of this involves being teachable, being open to new ideas and new ways of doing things. As the famous football coach John Wooden said, “What counts, is what you learn after you know it all.” Isn’t that interesting: The value of always being open to learning! As I was preparing this morning’s lesson, I ran across a reference to a study that found that almost 1/3 of all physicians were so busy working that they were at least two years behind on the latest developments in their field. Again, very interesting! We can get so distracted doing good things that we fail to learn and develop wisdom as we should.

So, the Bible tells us to get wisdom. We get wisdom today by asking God for it—just as Solomon did, and just as we are told to do in James 1:5, ***“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”*** Sometimes we get wisdom by going to school and taking classes under people who are wiser than we are. Since Haley is here, I can point out that Freed-Hardeman’s long-time motto has been, “Teaching how to live and how to make a living.” The emphasis is not just on learning facts out of a textbook, but on how to apply those facts to everyday Christian living. And that is so important, because as we know, formal education is just a part of getting wisdom. This generation has access to more facts than all previous generations combined, and yet all of this information does not really make us much wiser. We get real wisdom, then, by knowing the word of God. Most of you here right now were hopefully also here during the Bible classes this morning. Did we learn something from God’s word this morning? One of the best ways to learn is to hear it repeated and to talk about it. On the way home, then, let us ask our children, “What is one interesting thing that you learned in class this morning?” And then, “What is one interesting thing that you learned in the sermon this morning?” Let us pursue wisdom.

**II. At this time, let’s move on to the second paragraph here in Proverbs 4, and let us consider the fact that Solomon warns his son to STAY ON THE PATH AND NOT TO GET PULLED OFF TO ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER BY EVIL INFLUENCES.**

And I think all of us know the danger that Solomon is warning about here. Most of us have probably done things with the encouragement of our friends that we would never do while thinking more clearly on our own. I remember being a student at Lundahl Junior High down in Crystal Lake, Illinois, and riding my bike to school with friends from the neighborhood. One day we got a few boxes of those little snaps that explode when you throw them really hard at something...or someone. We threw those things at each other the whole way to school one day. But then it got worse. We took them into class and threw them in class. I remember hitting a friend right under the eye. I never would have done that on my own, but when we are with other people we can very easily get pulled away from what we know is right. By the way, we thought we got away with all of that, but later that afternoon, I was called into the assistant principal’s office, and there was nothing on her huge desk (not even a pen or a pencil)—there was nothing on her desk...except one of those little snaps right in the middle. At that point, I knew my life was over! But friends have a way of getting each other in trouble, and that is what Solomon is warning about here.

Notice: In verses 10-13, Solomon tells his son to hang on, listen to what I've taught you, don't let go. And then the warning in verse 14, ***"Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil."*** In other words: Do not allow yourself to be pulled away from what you know is right. In verse 15: Don't even go in that direction! And starting in verse 16, a description of certain people who would eventually try to influence his son's life, ***"For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong; they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble."*** Haven't we all known people like that? Some people cannot rest until they have pulled someone down with them. In verse 17, ***"...they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence."*** In verse 19, ***"The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble."*** Solomon, then, is saying: Don't go in that direction! Stay away! Consider your friends, and choose your companions carefully! We remember Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 15:33, ***"Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals."*** Solomon knew it, Paul knew it, and we also know it today: Our so-called friends can either reinforce what we already know to be the truth, or they can very quickly and very easily pull us down a very dangerous path. As King Solomon's father, David, wrote in Psalm 1, ***"How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night."*** Solomon, then, is encouraging us to get wisdom from God and then to not allow ourselves to get pulled away from it.

### III. **There is a third basic idea in this chapter, and it comes in Solomon's encouragement to his son that HE IS TO PROTECT HIS HEART.**

In verse 23, Solomon says, ***"Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life."*** Solomon, then, is talking about the core of our understanding, the heart. Today, we know how important the heart really is. We get our cholesterol checked. Soldiers wear armor over their hearts. Police officers wear vests as well. The heart is important. But Solomon, of course, is not talking about the heart as a muscle, but he is talking about us on the inside, who we are. The core needs to be protected. And to do this, Solomon refers to various parts of the body, to various outward expressions.

In verse 24, for example, we are told to protect the heart by putting away ***"crooked speech"*** and ***"devious talk."*** We remember what Jesus said when He quoted this concept in Matthew 12:34-37, ***"You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."***

In verse 25, Solomon refers to the eyes as he says that our eyes are to ***"look directly forward."*** In other words, we must control our focus, we must not allow ourselves to get distracted and pulled aside. Researchers tell us that information we get through our eyes has more of an impact on us than anything else. That's why we remember more than 80% of what we see and only about 11% of what we hear. That's why we use bulletin boards, and pictures, and the projector up here. We remember how Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden as he successfully got her to look at that fruit. The Bible says (in Genesis 3:6) that, ***"When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate."*** Once she saw it, therefore, that is when she gave in to the temptation. Solomon, then, is saying that we must be careful what we see.

And then also notice the last two verses in this chapter as Solomon talks about our feet. We are told to **“ponder”** the path of our feet; literally, we are to weigh our options—I can go here, or I can go here—we are weighing the evidence as we make a decision. We do this when we consider buying a house or a car, we do this when we decide where to go to college, and we are also to weigh our options when making a moral decision. We are to turn our feet away from evil. Protect your heart, King Solomon says!

We are to protect our heart just as we would protect our wallet in a crowd. Yesterday it hit me that I have been preaching in Wisconsin for more than 20 years now. My first fill-in sermon at the church in Janesville was in August of 1991. Thinking back over those 20 years, I have seen some interesting things accidentally left at various church buildings—glasses, umbrellas, cell phones, coats, hats, various dishes, Bibles, children—but you know, I have never found a man’s wallet! And why is that? It is because we protect our wallets. Solomon would say: Protect your heart like that! Keep it safe! Keep it pure!

### **Conclusion:**

This morning we have looked at Solomon’s instructions to his son. He wanted his son to spend his life searching for wisdom. He wanted his son to stay on that narrow path, not allowing himself to get turned to one side or another by various negative influences. And above all, King Solomon wanted his son to protect his heart, to keep his heart close to God. I realize that we may see all kinds of warnings and various suggestions all around us that are meant to keep us safe. But I hope we realize this morning that God also has some Fatherly advice for us. In this case, it comes through King Solomon. It is interesting, however, that Jesus spoke of Solomon in Matthew 12:42, where Jesus said, ***“The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”*** Something greater than Solomon is here! Jesus is greater than Solomon. What we have studied this morning is important, we can learn from it, but the message from Jesus is that salvation is available. Jesus purchased our salvation with His own blood. We respond to that sacrifice with faith, with humble obedience. We express our faith in Jesus as being the Son of God, we turn away from our sins, and we allow ourselves to be buried in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any questions, please ask. If you would like for us to pray about some situation in your life right now, let us know. But if you believe in Jesus and are ready to repent of your sins and are ready to be baptized, by all means, let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

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