

# Getting Wisdom

WISDOM FROM DAD • PROVERBS 4:1-9 • PART 1

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This morning I would invite you to turn with me to the book of Proverbs. Some of you might remember that we have been coming back to Proverbs very occasionally in something of a long-term series of lessons from this book. And by “long-term,” I am referring to a series that may very well continue into eternity. I don’t really expect to finish in my lifetime. We started several years ago, and as we’ve had opportunity, we have taken a few verses here and there as we have started to move through this book. And today, we come to Proverbs 4 (p. 1006).

Most of the book of Proverbs was written by King Solomon, the third king of Israel, and son of King David. And as we learned in the opening verses of Proverbs 1, Solomon is writing this book to try to pass along some wisdom to his children. And this is certainly very obvious in Chapter 4. Thankfully, Chapter 4 has some structure to it. I’m hoping we can look at the first 9 verses today, verses 10-19 next week, and verses 20-27 the week after that. If you look at the chapter as a whole, you might notice that some translations actually divide it into paragraphs like that, and each paragraph starts with an appeal or a command for Solomon’s sons to hear the teaching of their father. We see variations of this encouragement or command, then, in verse 1, in verse 10, and in verse 20, “**listen, listen, listen.**” Today, though, we want to start with the first section - Proverbs 4:1-9.

However, we have something rather unusual in the middle of this paragraph as Solomon quotes somebody else. And we will note this in just a little bit, but it seems that Solomon is quoting his father. He is thinking back to his own childhood, and he is remembering something that his father used to say, and he probably said it quite often. So, this is rather unusual, that in a sense, we seem to have a passage that is basically by King David, but it is here, in the book of Proverbs. I hope that makes sense, but we have Solomon quoting his father for at least part of this paragraph.

But with this in mind by way of background, let us please look together this morning at Proverbs 4:1-9,

- <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.”*

As we think about what Solomon has written here, as we think about these inspired words and how to apply these words to our lives today, as we ask the “So what?” question, I want us to do something we don’t do very often, and that is: I want to preach a backwards sermon this morning. I hope this will make sense as we move through it, but I want us to start with the third of three points! So, we are starting at the end of this passage and moving back toward the beginning. Microsoft Word and PowerPoint both thought I was having a mental breakdown this week. Neither one knew how to handle this!

**III. But I want to start at the end of this passage as we note (primarily in verses 8-9) that there are some amazing BENEFITS to the kind of wisdom Solomon is promoting here. Or we might say that wisdom has some REWARDS.**

So we start at the end; we start with the goal: Ultimately, wisdom is good for us! This is where we want to end up. Notice, please, in verses 8-9 that wisdom will “**exalt**” us, wisdom will “**honor**” us, wisdom will give us a crown, a “**garland of grace**,” and she will present us with a “**crown of beauty**.” And really, these benefits are alluded to throughout the passage and throughout the book of Proverbs. In verse 4, Solomon says that we will “**live**” when we keep his commandments. In verse 6, wisdom will “**guard**” us and “**watch over**” us. Wisdom protects us in some sense.

And this is where we might need to review what wisdom actually is. As I understand it, wisdom is the practical application of knowledge. Wisdom isn’t just knowing things, but the wise person will know how to handle certain knowledge; the wise person will know how to apply that knowledge. Perhaps many of us have seen the meme suggesting that knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit, but wisdom is knowing not to put a tomato in a fruit salad. And that is a simple illustration, but that is what wisdom is, the practical application of knowledge. There is a difference between knowing something and knowing what that information means in practical terms in the way we live our lives. And Solomon comes to the conclusion in this passage that wisdom brings life, wisdom exalts and protects, wisdom exalts and honors us, wisdom has a way of watching over us.

So, we have wisdom as a goal at the end of this passage. Do we want to be exalted and honored? Do we want to live? Would we like to be guarded and protected? If so, then we want wisdom! And so much of this comes

down to decisions we make, and the challenge is: Many of our most important decisions are made when we are young, when we have the least amount of experience. These critical decisions are often made in our teens and early 20's. Will we get married? Who will we marry? What do we plan on doing for a living? Where will we live? Will we continue our education? Where will we go to school? How will we spend our free time? Who will we have as friends? How will we honor God? How will I take care of my body? How will I spend my money? And on and on. Many of these huge decisions are made when we are young and have the least experience. We need wisdom, then, to guide us through these decisions. So, wisdom is our goal. Wisdom is what we are aiming for here. Wisdom is our conclusion this morning. We want to end up with wisdom, because wise choices lead to honor and life.

II. **We now move backwards in this passage, and we have Solomon explaining the SOURCE of wisdom - Where does wisdom come from? And we find right in the middle of this passage that in this case, wisdom comes from Solomon's father - and we might even widen that a bit as we realize today that wisdom often comes from previous generations - WISDOM IS PASSED ON FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION - wisdom comes from those who have lived longer than we have - wisdom comes from those who have learned some life-lessons the hard way.**

Obviously, the passage starts with Solomon's command to, "*Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father.*" But the emphasis comes in verses 3-4, where he says, "*When I was a son to my father, tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, then he taught me and said to me, 'Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments and live.'*" So, we need to remember: These life lessons Solomon refers to here are not coming from some kind of a school or a university. These are not the lessons we might learn at a place like the University of Wisconsin here in Madison. These are not lessons we can learn at Madison College or Edgewood. But instead, we are talking about true wisdom here - not just facts, but the application of those facts. For many years, Freed-Hardeman University has had the motto, "Teaching how to live and how to make a living." I think we see the distinction there, and that might be what King Solomon is getting at. There is more to life than just making a living. Somebody needs to teach us how to live. And in this context, the teacher is Solomon's father. We actually have three generations here, don't we? We have Solomon, he is writing to his sons, and he is passing along some life lessons from his own father. So we have a grandfather, a parent, and a child, three generations, and wisdom is getting passed along from generation to generation.

Notice, in verse 3, how Solomon refers back to a time in his life when he was "*tender.*" It's the idea of being weak, and soft, and pliable, and teachable. When we are young, we are eager to learn. We are soaking it all in like a sponge. Over time, we harden and we resist new information, we resist being influenced. But when we are young, we are teachable. If you are still living at home with your parents, this means you have the privilege and the responsibility to listen and learn. You still have a chance to listen to their words, to perhaps learn from some of the mistakes they have made in their lives, you have a chance to learn from their experience - not just the kind of knowledge we might learn at school, but true wisdom. Your parents have been through some situations that you need to know about. But the other lesson here is for parents: As parents, we have have a sacred responsibility to do the kind of teaching Solomon is talking about here! This world we live in is ready and willing to shape our children. This past Wednesday, we talked about one of Taylor Swift's recent videos. This world is on a mission to paint the Christian faith as hateful and backwards. But we as parents have a narrow window not just to teach, but to show, what true Christian living is all about. We have the ability to apply knowledge and to pass this wisdom along from one generation to the next. We need to be examples worthy of being followed. And all of this certainly fits in with what Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:1-4, the passage Jim read for us earlier, where Paul told children to obey their parents and where he told fathers to bring up

their children ***“in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”*** Children must learn, but parents need to give them something worth learning.

- I. **And this brings us to our first point this morning - we’ve seen the value of wisdom, we’ve seen where this wisdom needs to come from - and now we end with the command, we end with the big idea - and the command is: We are to GET WISDOM - this is an INTENTIONAL QUEST, this is a MISSION that has been assigned to us, this is a COMMAND TO BE OBEYED.**

And really, the command is repeated over and over in this passage. In verse 1, he opens with the command to ***“hear.”*** In verse 2, he puts it as a negative, ***“Do not abandon my instruction.”*** In verse 4, he’s remembering his own father (David) telling him to, ***“Keep my commandments and live.”*** We then have a number of commands in verse 5, as he says, ***“Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding!”*** He is not to ***“forget nor turn away”*** from these words of wisdom. In verse 6, wisdom is personified as a woman, and he tells his son not to forsake her, but to love her. Love wisdom! In verse 7, we come back to the command to ***“Acquire wisdom, and with all your acquiring, get understanding.”*** He is to ***“prize”*** wisdom (in verse 8). There are quite a few commands in this passage, but I would point out that the command to ***“acquire”*** wisdom is found five times only two verses. When we studied how to study the Bible a while back, we learned that we need to pay special attention to words that are repeated, and ***“acquire”*** is one of those words here. It is a Hebrew word meaning, to “get” or “acquire,” and it is actually the name that Cain was given. You might remember how Eve said (in Genesis 4:1), ***“I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord.”*** She “got” a baby, so she named him “Got.” This is the word Solomon uses a number of times here. He wants his children to ***“get wisdom,”*** to ***“acquire wisdom.”*** This is a command. And if gaining wisdom can be commanded, then obviously, getting wisdom is a choice. We are not commanded to do the impossible. Wisdom is something we can ***“get.”*** We can obtain it. We can work for it.

As we know, though, wisdom isn’t something we can go out and purchase at Wal-Mart. I can’t get a good deal on wisdom at Goodwill or UW SWAP. Wisdom is not on the menu down at Culvers. We will never find it in a vending machine or in a cooler at Kwik Trip. But, gaining wisdom is an intentional quest. It’s something we need to go diligently searching for.

When I think of searching for something, I think of looking for the car keys or maybe looking for a lost cell phone. If we lose something like that, usually we don’t just shrug it off as if it’s no big deal, but we stop what we are doing, and we tear the house apart, don’t we? We retrace our steps, we ask people if they’ve seen it, we make sure nobody is messing with us (as sometimes happens at our house), but it is a big deal to us. Our mission is to find whatever it is we are looking for. In perhaps a slightly similar way, wisdom isn’t usually an accident, but (like our keys or a cell phone) wisdom is something we also need to go out looking for. We pursue it. We chase after it. We hunt it down. Gaining wisdom is a process.

On Wednesday evening a month or two ago, I told you that somebody from our neighborhood posted on NextDoor, asking whether anybody in the neighborhood had a metal detector. We bought a cheap one a few years ago to help find the survey markers around my parents’ house, so I offered to let them borrow ours. The woman explained that her husband had lost a bit of weight, he was out for a run, and his wedding ring had slipped off of his finger into a weeded area somewhere near where the Ice Age Trail crosses Highway PD down on the far southwest side of Madison. They picked up the metal detector, but they didn’t find the ring. They asked to borrow the detector a few more days, and finally they found it. What a relief that must have been! They then returned it along with a gift and a very nice note. But the point is: They had to go looking! That ring

was not going to find itself. But it was important to them, so in the heat of the summer, they put their lives on hold until they found it. Wisdom is like that. We need to put in some effort to get it.

So, the question now is: How do we get wisdom? “So what?” as we sometimes ask. If wisdom is the proper application of knowledge, how do we get that? I want us to think about something for a moment. Remember: This passage is basically Solomon remembering these words from his own father, King David. So, over and over again as a child, Solomon heard this from his own father: Get wisdom! Get wisdom! Get wisdom! David dies, Solomon takes over as king, and God comes to Solomon in a dream, offering him anything he wants, and what is Solomon’s only request? Out of all of the things Solomon could have asked for, Solomon asked for wisdom! Is there a lesson here for us? Absolutely! James tells us that, **“...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.”** So, we ask God for it. But we also know that there is some effort involved.

In a sense, when we ask God for wisdom, we are opening the door. We are making ourselves available. We are taking on a teachable spirit. We have a few teachers with us this morning. I am guessing that if a student comes up to you and says, “Will you please teach me some math today?” that right there would be huge! When somebody is eager and willing to learn, that is more than half the battle. I think of Cornelius and his family and friends. He had been praying, God sent Peter, and when Peter showed up, Cornelius said to Peter, **“Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”** What an awesome attitude! That needs to be our attitude when we come together as a church. So, it starts with an attitude. It starts with a teachable spirit.

Spiritually, then when we ask God for wisdom, it seems the next step for us would involve actually opening his word or coming to a place like this where the word of God is taught and respected. This book we are studying today is God’s message to us. So, we open ourselves to learning, and then we pay attention to what God has said. We pay attention to the written word. Remember: In verse 1, King Solomon told his sons to, **“give attention that you may gain understanding.”** To **“give attention”** comes from a word that means, “to incline,” to “tilt or turn,” in a sense. I think of what happens when our beagle hears anything in plastic packaging. What happens? At the first crinkle, her head will turn, and at that point, you know that she is paying attention. Food is about to happen! She is tuned in! And that seems to be what Solomon is encouraging here. When God speaks, we are to incline our ears, we are to pay attention to the word of God.

And as parents, we can reinforce this spiritually on our way home from worship. Perhaps we can ask our kids, “What is one interesting thing you learned in Bible class this morning?” And they have to answer! “What is one interesting thing you learned today in class that you didn’t know before class?” And the same goes for worship, “What is one interesting thing you learned in the sermon this morning?” Or, “What is one interesting thing you learned in the assembly today?” And then we can talk about that. We can share what we have learned. And we can do what Solomon is commanding here. Knowing the benefits of wisdom, we can make a point of sharing that wisdom from one generation to the next. So, we have a teachable spirit, we open the word of God, and then we discuss it within the family. This is what Solomon is encouraging us to do in the opening verses of Proverbs 4.

### **Conclusion:**

Hopefully, next week we can continue by looking at the middle paragraph in Proverbs 4. I would encourage you to read ahead and to come prepared next Lord’s Day morning with an open and prepared heart for what

comes next. As we come to the end of our study this morning, we need to bring it back to Jesus, as we often do when we study from the Proverbs. And we do this because of something Jesus himself said in Matthew 12:42. In Matthew 12, the scribes and the Pharisees were demanding a sign, they wanted Jesus to do something amazing, and Jesus responds by saying that, ***“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! This is why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:24 that ***“Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*** This command to ***“get wisdom”*** in Proverbs 4 is actually an invitation to come to Jesus, to accept Jesus as ***“the wisdom of God.”*** God’s wisdom is revealed to us through the gospel, the good news of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection (as we studied last week). And so, this morning, if you would like to know more, let us know. Pull me aside after the service today, and we can set up a time to get together. But, if you are ready to obey the gospel, if you are ready to turn away from sin, to confess Jesus as the Son of God, and if you are ready to be immersed into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you can let all of us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

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