

“The Heart of Wisdom”
Proverbs 4:20-27
2019

Week Twelve, “Father Knows Best,” Proverbs 1-9

INTRODUCTION:

In today’s text, the father is going to probe the very center of his son’s being — which determines everything, including how healthy we are. The heart is the center of our life, and it determines how we think, feel, and choose.

READ MATTHEW 15:18-20

“But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

Of course, the father has a different dream for his son.

READ PSALM 119:11

“I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”

Can we say that? If so, as we’ll see the verses tonight, we have a great chance of being both healthy and holy.

We’ll lets move into our text. Again, we’ll break it down in two obvious pieces.

I. A Healthy Life:

READ PROVERBS 4:20-22

I think we have to take a step back here as we move into these texts and admit that God, as the Creator, as the designer, is the one who should write the user manual for our human bodies — both physically and spiritually. And He has done so.

It starts with this pursuit of wisdom. If we want to be healthy, we need to internalize wisdom, not just give it lip service, and that’s where the father is going in this section.

Ray Ortlund Jr. has put it so well: “Life does not flow from the outside in; it flows from the inside out.”

Oh, friends, do you get that? Do you understand that?

For example, overeating or really any food disorder is simply a symptom of something deeper, something internal, and I’d argue that sleep issues, even including bad dreams, are the same way.

God has told us what holds the power of healthy living — but are we listening? Well, the father is going to check.

A. A call

READ PROVERBS 4:20

“My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings.”

Of course, we can’t lose sight of who we’re actually reading and studying — this is Solomon, and he knows what he’s talking about. He had abandoned his own wisdom for years and suffered the consequences . . . just read Ecclesiastes.

So now he’s calling his son to pay attention, to invite wisdom in. But, as the old saying goes, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.”

READ JOHN 10:3

“To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”

Oh, friends, will you listen to God’s wisdom? Or to something else?

READ EPHESIANS 5:4

“Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.”

READ PSALM 1:1a

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked . . .”

Who or what counsel are you listening to? But let’s move on.

B. A command

READ PROVERBS 4:21

“Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart.”

You can’t fault the father for trying to apply a little pressure here — this definitely feels more like a command, like an attempt to impose his will on the son.

And, of course, parents can and must command obedience in the home — but we cannot legislate holiness, as much as we wish we could.

Just take the prodigal son, for example. Nothing in Scripture indicates that father did anything wrong . . . but the son simply refused to listen. He did not internalize wisdom, and it cost him for far too long.

READ COLOSSIANS 3:16

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

Again, what are we listening to? The father begs us to internalize wisdom.

But we have to conclude this section.

C. A comment

READ PROVERBS 4:22

“For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh.”

Yes, he restored to a strong command — but can we not understand why when we understand the power of wisdom?

Wisdom is God’s owner’s manual for the body. His principles confer life — quantity and quality — and bring healing.

The human body is so incredibly complex — can we not admit that we need His help living this life wisely?

READ I TIMOTHY 4:8

“For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

I so often feel sorry for the workout warriors that fail to pursue God’s wisdom — their health is a charade; it doesn’t fulfill. It doesn’t sustain. It doesn’t even bring life.

They are just making the external shell look better . . . for as long as that can possibly last.

Oh, friends, wisdom is where it is at! Do we believe this?

And, if we do, it then demands access to the rest of our bodies. A true holy life will exert control of our heart, our mouth, our eyes, and even our feet.

Let’s break it down.

II. A Holy Life:

READ PROVERBS 4:23-27

Lest we be confused, living a holy life is not just internal, although it starts there as we’ll see. But it pervades all of us. It just has to.

READ ROMANS 12:1

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

Of course, there’s a reason why we entitled this lesson, “The Heart of Wisdom.” That’s because the heart really does matter — it’s the key. Out of the heart flows our thoughts, our words, our life choices, and those things dictate the behavior of our mouths, eyes, and even feet.

Let’s break it down.

A. A clean heart

READ PROVERBS 4:23

“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”

Surely we remember David’s prayer?

READ PSALM 51:10

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

That's what is in view here, of course. Your heart is really the true you, and it determines your orientation to God.

If you are God-directed, you need to protect it with all vigilance — and, if you aren't, you need to get right. Period.

And, of course, it all starts with salvation.

SHARE GOSPEL

READ JOHN 7:37-38

“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

Without Christ, there's nothing life-giving that can flow out of our hearts.

READ JEREMIAH 31:33

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put My law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

But, with Christ, we have something to offer to others, and even ourselves. But it takes a clean heart to approach God in a way that is sustaining and healthy.

READ PSALM 24:3-4

“Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.”

And, whether we realize it or not, our heart — synonymous with the soul here — has a hunger that only Christ can satisfy.

Of course, a clean heart is a rare thing. Elsewhere in Scripture, we see a hard heart (Proverbs 28:14), a proud heart (Proverbs 21:4), and unbelieving heart (Hebrews 3:12) a cold heart (Matthew 24:12) and an unclean heart (Psalm 51:10).

Which should all give us pause, considering the power of the heart.

READ MARK 7:21-23

“For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Of course, not all hearts are wicked and evil. Christ purifies our heart — but the battle always rages. That's why he see warfare terms in the New Testament when the armor of Christ is mentioned.

READ EPHESIANS 6:14

“Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness . . .”

The heart is under attack and guess what? Only righteousness, holiness can protect it.

And, time demands that we move on . . . but please understand the blunt reality: unless you have a new heart through salvation in Jesus Christ, you will continually fail when it comes to the next parts of the anatomy we'll discuss.

The heart is the key!

B. A cautious mouth

READ PROVERBS 4:24

“Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you.”

Theologian W. McKane has bluntly said, “As one speaks, so is he.” We really can't argue with that.

And this verse kind of points us toward two truths: speech matters both in terms of what comes out of our lips but also in terms of who we listen to.

Which is tough because this is already a tough area.

READ JAMES 3:8

“But no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”

READ LUKE 6:45

“The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”

Unfortunately, the tongue/mouth is often an agent of doom in our lives. Proverbs alone mentions perverse lips, lying lips, flattering lips, deceptive lips, and undisciplined lips.

The mouth and tongue are problems. Period.

And, if you do not have control over your heart, you’ll have no chance with your tongue. And a mouth full of crooked speech points one in the path of the wicked.

One follows the other as night follows day.

But, if we’re followers of Christ, our life and speech should be different.

READ COLOSSIANS 4:6

“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”

How are you doing? Well, we can’t stop here. We have to keep moving through the anatomy in this look at a holy life. Everything matters, including:

C. A controlled eye

READ PROVERBS 4:25

“Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you.”

The father kind of returns to “the path” metaphor he used earlier here. As he established before, there is one straight way — there should be no deviation, no turning to the left or right, and even no seeking the middle road or compromise, either.

Just go directly forward.

Why? Because looking elsewhere could easily make us stumble.

It’s all we all got where we are.

READ GENESIS 3:6

“So 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 to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.”

Why would we repeat Eve’s mistakes?

READ DEUTERONOMY 5:32

“You shall be careful therefore to do as the LORD your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.”

READ JOSHUA 1:7

“Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses My servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.”

The eyes have tremendous power in this journey we are. It’s why the pornographic epidemic is so destructive. What the eyes see affect a man’s heart, a man’s marriage, a man’s sexual desires, a man’s behavior toward women — you can’t separate all of those things from sight.

As the old saying goes, “Outlook determines outcome.”

You can’t to love your wife and be faithful? Don’t look around. Don’t look at other women. Don’t look at pornography.

It’s really not too complicated . . . but the sin in our hearts wants to justify all kinds of behavior.

But Jesus doesn’t accept such excuses.

READ MATTHEW 18:9

“And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.”

Why not focus on what really matters?

READ HEBREWS 11:10

“For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.”

READ HEBREWS 12:2

“Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Let’s focus on the right things, the right way. And that, of course, leads to the last thing.

D. A careful foot

READ PROVERBS 4:26-27

“[26] Ponder the path of your feet;

then all your ways will be sure.

[27] Do not swerve to the right or to the left;

turn your foot away from evil.”

Now, again, I don’t we can separate this from the previous wisdom we discussed regarding the “controlled eye.” The careful foot starts with the controlled eye.

It all feeds together. You can’t be unhealthy in one area and expect to be healthy in another — especially when it comes to our eyes and feet.

Essentially, this phraseology implies that we should “clear a path” for our feet — to be forward thinking, to be focused on the right things.

But let’s break it down.

1. A planned walk

READ PROVERBS 4:26

“Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure.

As Socrates has written, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” So we have to give thought to where we are going and how we are going to get there.

Which begs for us to select the right path — wisdom’s path.

READ PSALM 37:23

“The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when he delights in His way.”

And, accordingly, if we are predictable — doing the right things, walking the right way, living the right way — God will establish our path.

Or, as this text puts it: “then all your ways will be sure.”

That is the passive voice, implying that God will establish our ways and grant us security.

It’s a beautiful, peaceful picture in a dangerous world, in my opinion.

But let’s move on.

2. A perfect walk

READ PROVERBS 4:27a

“Do not swerve to the right or to the left . . .”

Again, we’re back to this idea of walking straight along God’s path, avoiding the detours, the left and right, even the path of compromise.

READ JOSHUA 23:6

“Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left.”

Looking behind us or behind trapped in the past can be equally dangerous.

READ LUKE 9:62

“Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’”

Remember what happened to Peter when he took his eyes off of Jesus?

READ MATTHEW 14:30

“But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, ‘Lord, save me.’”

It’s a fitting analogy for all of our lives. You can say this is dogmatic — I call it dedicated.

And it works. But we've seen the planned walk, the perfect walk — now on to the last thing.

3. A protected walk

READ PROVERBS 4:27b

“Turn your foot away from evil.”

We can't lose sight of the battle here. We've been talking about a healthy and holy life — and so much of that starts by turning from evil.

You want to protect your family? Your life? Your steps?

Turn from evil! There are just some doorways in life we should not darken.

Remember Lot's choice back in Genesis?

READ GENESIS 13:12

“Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom.”

That was the beginning of the end for Lot, all because he did not turn his foot away from evil. He cozied up to it; drew near.

And eventually judgment fell.

You want a holy life? Then turn your foot away from evil!

Yes, I'll admit that you can't always see it coming. Sometimes, we get fooled. Sometimes we miss the warning signs or even get betrayed.

But there's a lot of evil in the world that we can see, touch, feel, taste, sense from miles and miles away. Why not turn aside from such influences?

It's one of the keys to a healthy and holy life, of course.

But, how about we make this really practical tonight.

READ II CORINTHIANS 13:5

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”

Tests are good. Tests show us where we are. So here is a great test to finish with. Ask yourself:

1. What comes into my ears?
2. What is within my heart?
3. What is upon my lips?
4. What is before my eyes?
5. What is beyond my path?

READ PSALM 139:23

“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

It's a simple exercise, but it's the key to revival. And it unlocks the door for us to be both healthy and holy.

Let's let God have ownership over our hearts. Amen? Amen!

CONCLUSION: