

Session 4

# The Choice

*All people have a choice to make: follow God or reject Him.*

Proverbs 4:11-27



**Have you gotten confused over a choice because you had so many options?  
How did you make the choice?**

Life is filled with choices—maybe too many choices, but choices nonetheless. Hearing the truth demands a response as well, a choice to either embrace or reject the truth. There is no neutrality when it comes to the truth. Neutrality is a choice to reject the truth. Solomon’s plea in Proverbs 4 to hear, obey, and not turn away from the wisdom of God reminded God’s people of the choices that lay before them. To embrace God’s wisdom provides a way through life; to reject God’s wisdom is to ensure destruction.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In chapters 1–3, Solomon laid out the dimensions of God’s wisdom. He then called God’s people to “listen” and “pay attention” (4:1). He knew that information does not necessarily mean transformation and facts do not always lead to obedient faith. Solomon urged God’s people to hear and apply God’s truth.

The path of wisdom is defined in 4:1-11. Solomon reminded God’s people to remember the wisdom of God as though they were remembering the wisdom of their fathers and mothers. He challenged them not to abandon God’s instruction but to obtain its wise counsel at all costs. No price is too high to obtain God’s truth. Further, Solomon called God’s people to embrace and cherish truth as if it were a precious commodity.

Then, as if to add layer upon layer of the choices God’s people must make to live according to God’s wisdom, Solomon described in striking terms two separate ways of living (vv. 11-27). One way leads to destruction and the other way leads to life. The decision to remain in one’s sin, devoid of the wisdom of God, is a choice set before all people. All people are already in the way of sin and destruction; God’s wisdom and grace in Jesus Christ is the only exit ramp off the way of the unwise.

# PROVERBS 4:11-27

**11** I am teaching you the way of wisdom;

I am guiding you on straight paths.

**12** When you walk, your steps will not be hindered;

when you run, you will not stumble.

**13** Hold on to instruction; don't let go.

**Guard** **A** it, for it is your life.

**14** Keep off the path of the wicked;

don't proceed on the way of evil ones.

**15** Avoid it; don't travel on it.

Turn away from it, and **pass it by** **B**.

**16** For they **can't sleep** **C**

unless they have done what is evil;

they are robbed of sleep

unless they make someone stumble.

**17** They eat the bread of wickedness

and drink the wine of violence.

**18** The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,

**shining brighter and brighter** **D** until midday.

**19** But the way of the wicked is like the **darkest gloom** **E**;

they don't know what makes them stumble.

**20** My son, pay attention to my words;

listen closely to my sayings.

**21** Don't lose sight of them;

keep them within your heart.

**22** For they are life to those who find them,

and health to one's whole body.

**23** Guard your heart above all else,

for it is the **source of life** **F**.

**24** Don't let your mouth speak dishonestly,

and don't let your lips talk deviously.

**25** Let your eyes look forward;

fix your gaze straight ahead.

**26** Carefully consider the path for your feet,

and all your ways will **be established** **G**.

**27** Don't turn to the right or to the left;

keep your feet away from evil.

## Passage Outline

The Path to Take

(Prov. 4:11-13)

The Path to Avoid

(Prov. 4:14-19)

The Choice to Make

(Prov. 4:20-27)

## Keywords

- A. The discipline of wisdom requires faithful obedience.
- B. A rapid series of commands that emphasize the urgency of rejecting the evil way of life
- C. Sin so enslaves evil people they can't sleep until they plot and carry out their wickedness.
- D. Describes the life of the righteous as full and certain
- E. Symbolizes moral failure, disaster, danger, and insecurity
- F. A person's heart (thinking, emotions, and will) is "where life starts" (The Message), determining the direction of one's life.
- G. Keeping fixed on God gives a sense of well-being, certainty, and rightness to people's lives as He directs their ways.

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

Godly wisdom is more than information to be obtained; it is a way of life to be lived. Verse 11 pictures life as a journey. It is vitally important to choose the right path on life's journey. God's wisdom will guide us *on straight paths*. Without God's wisdom to guide us, we'll run the risk of taking the wrong path, a crooked road that leads to destruction. Foolish people take that path. But wise believers seek God's guidance so we can choose the right path, the straight road that leads to a fulfilling life.

**How does following God's wisdom lead to life? What happens to our ability to choose the way of wisdom when we do not take seriously the consequences of choosing the opposite of wisdom?**

**KEY DOCTRINE: Scripture** The Holy Bible is a perfect treasure of divine instruction (Ps. 19:7-10).

There is, however, another path—the path of the wicked. Verses 14-15 consist of six commands related to the path of the wicked. This path to be avoided is jammed with people like a busy highway. The ones on this path are described as *the wicked* and *evil ones*.

**How does wickedness lead to more wicked acts? What examples reinforce this teaching?**

The path to avoid is the path of the wicked. The path to choose is the path of godly wisdom—a path that is entered through faith in Jesus Christ, “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

**If the path of wisdom is so clear and beneficial, why do so many not choose it?**

The benefits of living a godly and wise life are many. First, the godly instructions of the Word of God are *life to those who find them*. Secondly, they are *health to one's whole body*. Wisdom is beneficial and even life-giving to the wise, impacting both body and soul.

**Why was Solomon so repetitive in reminding his son to remember his words?**

Solomon knew that unless God's people were continually focused on God and His truth, they would easily stray off the path of righteousness.

**What is so enticing about wickedness that it causes us to lose our focus on what is right and good?**

**BIBLE SKILL: Identify the imagery in a verse or passage and discover what it communicates.** Reflect on Proverbs 4:11-27 and the implications of thinking about life as a journey. Write about what the picture of life as a journey teaches us about following the Lord or rejecting Him. For believers, what does it say to us about growing toward spiritual maturity in Christ? Give consideration to what Jesus communicated when He mentioned the wide gate and the narrow gate (Matt. 7:13-14).

# APPLY THE TEXT

- Following godly instruction leads to life.
- Wicked living leads to more wickedness and dissatisfaction.
- Righteous living calls for disciplined living.

**List the barriers that can keep you from choosing the way of wisdom. How can your awareness help you overcome those barriers?**

**Look for areas in your life where one step toward wickedness has caused another step. What actions can get you back on the right track?**

**In what areas of your life do you need to be more disciplined? Discuss with your Bible study group ways of helping each other be more disciplined in your spiritual walk.**

## Prayer Requests

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# DAILY EXPLORATION

## Day 1: Following God's wisdom leads to life.

**Read Proverbs 4:11-13, understanding the instructions shared in verse 13.**

Solomon used three images to make his point about staying on the straight path of wisdom. First, we are told to *hold on* to godly instruction. How do we hold on to godly instruction that helps us to be wise in the Lord? It needs to be used. God's truth can be useless to us if we tuck it away for safekeeping but never take time to consider it, listen to it, and follow it. The Bible offers us a wealth of godly wisdom and shows us how to be wise in Him. Too often, Bibles gather dust as they sit idly on tables, nightstands, and shelves. The treasure of God's Word makes a difference to us only when we place it in our hearts. That's how we hold on to godly instruction.

Second, *don't let go* of God's wisdom and truth. Like hanging on to the guardrails overlooking a steep ravine, Solomon encouraged God's people to cling to God and His wisdom.

Third, Solomon called on his son to *guard* the wisdom of God. Why was Solomon so impassioned about guarding godly instruction? He would answer this question with this singular truth: *for it* (the wisdom of God) *is your life*. God's wisdom is not optional equipment; it is life! Paul echoed this same idea when he declared Christ to be our very life. (See Col. 3:4.)

**How does following God's wisdom lead to life? What happens to your ability to choose the way of wisdom when you do not take seriously the consequences of rejecting wisdom?**

## Day 2: Wickedness must be avoided.

**Read Proverbs 4:14-17, considering why wickedness is a lifestyle to be avoided.**

The life of the wicked is a sleepless one. Solomon argued that they can't sleep unless they have done what is evil or they make someone stumble. Wickedness can consume a person to the point of keeping him or her awake at night. Evil people may lie in bed with nothing on their minds except how they can hurt someone. They won't be able to sleep until they have brought despair, grief, or sorrow to the doorstep of some unsuspecting victim. Using the image of eating and drinking, Solomon shed light on how people behave when they follow the path of wickedness. They gorge themselves with dishes made with wickedness and violence. Solomon's point is that wickedness is the willful and deliberate activity of the wicked. It is this type of lifestyle that the righteous must avoid.

**How have you seen wickedness lead to more wicked acts?**

### Day 3: Choose the path of godly wisdom.

**Read Proverbs 4:18-19, identifying the differences in the paths.**

In these two verses, Solomon summarized in clear and concise terms the two paths set before God's people. *The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, shining brighter and brighter until midday.* Wisdom brings light and understanding. Those who live by God's wisdom are on a path that is righteous. This path is growing brighter and brighter; it is a path of growth and maturity.

Conversely, *the way of the wicked is like the darkest gloom; they don't know what makes them stumble.* The further the wicked venture into wickedness the less they are able to see. The path of the wicked is both dark and blinding. The apostle Paul wrote, "the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4).

The path to avoid is the path of the wicked. The path to choose is the path of godly wisdom—a path that is entered through faith in Jesus Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

**If the path of wisdom is so clear and beneficial, why do so many not choose it?**

### Day 4: The choice to embrace wisdom is important.

**Read Proverbs 4:20-22, noticing Solomon's urging for his son to pay attention.**

Again, Solomon urged his son to pay attention to his words. He didn't want his sayings to go in one ear and out the other. He called his son to *listen closely ... don't lose sight of them; keep them within your heart.* The heart is the center of life.

The benefits of living a godly and wise life are many; Solomon listed two in verse 22. First, the godly instructions of the Word of God are *life to those who find them.* Secondly, they are *health to one's whole body.* Wisdom is beneficial and even life-giving to the wise, impacting both body and soul.

For Solomon the choice was clear: avoid all wickedness. It leads to blindness and death. Embrace God's wisdom that leads to light and life, brings glory to God, and results in a life of purpose and peace.

**Why was Solomon so repetitive in reminding his son to remember his words?**

## Day 5: Be aware of God’s purpose for your life.

**Read Proverbs 4:23-27, noting where your gaze should be fixed.**

Choosing the path of wisdom is a matter of the heart. Godly wisdom calls on believers to guard our hearts above all else. Our hearts serve as the physical, emotional, and spiritual source of our lives. What we put in our hearts determines how we live. We can guard our hearts by making sure we’re wise about what we allow to dwell there. If we let our hearts be filled with foolish thoughts, we will pay a price in foolish actions. If we allow God’s instruction to dwell in our hearts, we will reap the reward of a life lived wisely.

Choosing the path of wisdom is also a matter of vision and focus. We’re challenged to be wise about what we do with our eyes. The writer of Hebrews called on his readers to lay aside all sins and distractions and to keep their eyes on Jesus. (See Heb. 12:1-2.) To look forward and fix your gaze straight ahead reminds us not to be distracted from God’s purpose for our lives. From an awareness of God’s purpose of our lives, we’re able to make wise choices.

**What is so enticing about wickedness that it causes us to lose our focus on what is right and good?**

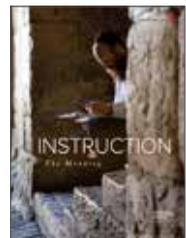
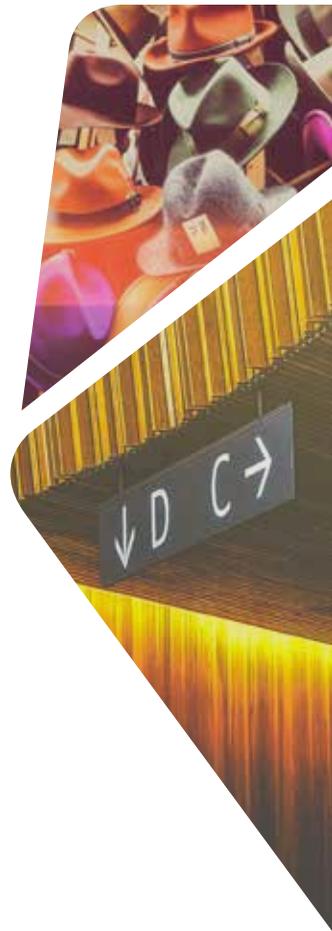
## TALK IT OUT

**Reflect on the truths found in Proverbs 4, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.**

Solomon used the metaphor of traveling a path to describe our choices in life. Why is this metaphor appropriate?

What words or phrases did Solomon use to convey the urgency and seriousness of avoiding the path of the wicked?

What strategies have you found helpful in staying diligent and disciplined?



For additional context, read “Instruction: The Meaning” in the Summer 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).