

Get Wisdom
Making Life Work Series Week 1: Proverbs 4
May 27, 2018

Welcome/intro/vision

This is week 1 of a new series called “Making Life Work”

As we move into the summer we’re going to spend the next handful of weeks looking at some principles from the Scripture that are there to help us to make life work and to live wisely

This is pretty critical for all of us, whether you’re a Jesus person or not

because all of us at points in our lives have made decisions that led us to places where our lives weren’t working well any more

A number of years ago we went away on vacation with three pretty little kids at the time and I was so incredibly exhausted going into vacation that I was barely there.

And in fact at one point I realized I was sitting at dinner with my wife and three kids at the beach and it SHOULD have been a wonderful little family scene where we were all fully engaged and enjoying each other

BUT in fact what was happening was that no one was talking to me at all, it was the four of them all talking to each other and I was watching, not really a part of the relational dynamic.

What I wanted to do was be frustrated at them or blame them. But the reality was that I had made so many bad decisions with my schedule and pace of life in the weeks and months leading up to that little vacation that I wasn’t present for them AT ALL –there, but not there

And my little kids knew it. They could see that I wasn’t really there. And I came back from that vacation and I knew that something needed to change.

How I was working wasn’t working for the people that mattered most in my life.

All of us at some point along the way have some experience where we wake up and realize that the place in life where we were just wasn’t working

Not always, but sometimes, if we’re honest about how we got to that place, the reason was that we made decisions that got us there

Occasionally it was one big fork in the road, but most often it was dozens and maybe hundreds of really small decisions that we made that have led us to that place

Over the next few weeks, we’re going to mine some wisdom nuggets for all of us in a book of the Bible called Proverbs

If you’re new to the Bible so glad that you’re here, Proverbs is an ancient book written a couple thousand years before Jesus

It’s a collection of wisdom saying mostly written by a man who is described to be the wisest man who ever lived, his name was Solomon

And Solomon was the king of ancient Israel during its ancient heyday, probably the time in Israel's ancient history when it had the most influence and was the most prosperous

And at one point God asks Solomon early in his kingship what do you want? God essentially gives Solomon a blank check and says he can ask for anything—can you imagine?

You know what Solomon says in response, "Please give me wisdom."

And God was so pleased with Solomon's request, he essentially says, "You could have asked for anything that you wanted but since you asked for wisdom, I'll give you that PLUS everything else you could have asked for: riches, fame, power, all of it"

And that's what happens.

And people from all over the ancient middle east and Africa hear of Solomon's wisdom and people come from far and wide to ask him questions and seek his counsel and get advice and sometimes just to try to trap him

Eventually Solomon has kids and he knows that his oldest son is going to be king some day. So he starts writing down his wisdom for his son so that he might be a good and wise king

And what these proverbs outline are principles for how things generally work. There's a very important distinction that needs to be made here between ***principles v. promises***

Throughout the Scriptures, there are all kinds of clear promises that we're invited to claim as locked-in sure-fire truths.

For example, Jesus says whoever will lose their lives for his sake will find it—that's a promise that you can bet your life on, many of us have

Proverbs isn't operating in quite the same way—in Proverbs you've got PRINCIPLES that in the aggregate are life-giving and make life work in the vast majority of cases but not always

In every arena of life there are principles that could be applied that are generally true but that there are always exceptions to

There are some generally true principles about farming, about working in sales, about marriage, about parenting your kids, about managing an employee or running your own business, about being a great teacher

And these principles are good and often tried and true but no principles always work all of the time. They all have to be applied in a specific situation or context that might preclude that principle from being applicable or sometimes it has to be modified just a bit

The book of Proverbs is full of WISE PRINCIPLES not promises, that make life work,

Today, we're going to get some wisdom from Proverbs chapter 4: Bible/no Bible

Start in Proverbs 4:1, here's what we were talking about earlier:

***Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction;
pay attention and gain understanding.***

There's the opening overture, king to his sons, getting them ready to rule when he's gone, and here's his big opening instructions, here's the macro picture, the headline, what he so wants his sons to do, skip down to v. 5:

Get wisdom, get understanding;

There you go, kids! GET WISDOM, there's my wise instructions to you. If I were talking to my kids, they'd just stare at me blankly at this point, completely underwhelmed with my wisdom

That's it? Those are the instructions? Get wisdom? Get understanding? That's all you got?

To which I reply, of course not! I've always got more to say! But this is where we start—at the very beginning, it's a very good place to start!

GET WISDOM, GET UNDERSTANDING

***⁷ The beginning of wisdom is this: Get¹ wisdom.
Though it cost all you have, get understanding.***

***⁸ Cherish her, and she will exalt you;
embrace her, and she will honor you.***

***⁹ She will give you a garland to grace your head
and present you with a glorious crown."***

In college I had a roommate **named Tarrus Carr**
who was a bit obsessed with **the t.v. show Cops. Anyone** remember Cops?
It came on every Saturday night at 8:00

And back then we all had these paper weekly calendars where we kept our schedules and on his calendar EVERY SATURDAY NIGHT at 8:00, he wrote in "Cops"

His Saturday night fun didn't start until he was done watching his Cops! Whenever possible he arranged his social life around the pursuit of Cops the t.v. show

This is something of what this father is calling his children to do:

I want you to completely ARRANGE and RE-ARRANGE YOUR WHOLE LIFE around this one wonderful pursuit—the pursuit of wisdom

Go get wisdom, pursue it, though you have to sell everything, re-arrange everything, risk everything, acquiring wisdom is worth putting at the center of your life and letting everything else revolve around it

Lots of attempts at explaining what wisdom is, let me take a crack at a very simple to start our conversation

Wisdom is knowledge rightly applied.

Wisdom requires some knowledge. You need to know some things about how the world works, about how people work, about how to navigate challenges or obstacles that we all face

Some people lack wisdom just because they don't know stuff. Just don't understand how something works.

I lack wisdom in helping physicists understand the problems of physicists just because I don't have any understanding or knowledge about how physics works!

So wisdom to some degree requires knowledge as the raw materials, the resources that get turned into wisdom

But wisdom is more than knowledge. There are all kinds of really smart people in the world who severely lack wisdom, they don't make wise decisions in their marriages or home or businesses—they can't integrate that smarts in real-time, real life

Meanwhile there are people who have little to no FORMAL education, no advanced degrees, who run circles around the people with Ph. D's when it comes to actually living a wise and flourishing life

Wisdom is knowledge rightly integrated and applied, matching pitch and bringing good information and understanding to bear in real-time to a real situation.

Google has knowledge but only humans can be wise—at least for now!

And this is why wisdom is so incredibly important ESPECIALLY today in our information and digital age

With Google information is cheap and easily accessible. Most everyone has all the access to all the information that anyone could ever need

What's rare is the ability to take that information and assimilate it and organize it and apply it to real life WISELY

Wisdom always has life in its wake. When you work under a wise boss or manager do you know who benefits? You do. Everyone does

When you have wise parents do you know who benefits? The kids do, the whole family does.

When you have a wise friend or family member, who benefits? You do, the whole family does, the whole network of friends does

Wisdom is life-giving, hope-giving, and it generates grace everywhere it goes—CAN YOU IMAGINE if the defining characteristic of your entire life was that you took knowledge and information and applied it rightly to almost every situation?

Can you imagine a life that was utterly marked and defined by wisdom?

Now, before we get too far down that road, notice that Solomon here is calling his sons to utterly arrange their lives in the pursuit of wisdom. He doesn't just say "Go, live a life of wisdom"

He recognizes that wisdom has to be LEARNED, it has to be ACQUIRED, it has to be CULTIVATED and chased after

So he challenges his sons and us to *arrange our lives and our hearts and actions and calendars and schedules in the pursuit and acquisition of real wisdom*

One of the traps that I sometimes fall into is sometimes I'll see a character trait in the Bible or in someone that I respect and I'll say, "I'd love me some of that!"

So I start praying for it: "God, give me wisdom."

Good impulse, good place to start--but at one point I realized what I wanted was the wisdom download from God, like a software update or a new operating system update

Just for God to zap me full of wisdom

And eventually I realized that along with praying for a character trait like wisdom or resilience or patience, I need to be willing to roll up my sleeves and go learn it, go cultivate it

And the answers to my prayers for character traits like wisdom or resilience or patience aren't going to be answered by God just downloading it on me

The answer from God was going to come in the form of situations, challenges, opportunities and mistakes that were sometimes put in front of me by God to teach me and shape me into becoming wise

What that meant was if I was praying for wisdom in the morning, I needed to go into my days with eyes wide open for how God was going to answer that request, sometimes in ways that I would rather he not!

Because the software download of wisdom would be a whole lot easier and less painful or bumpy than learning it as I make mistakes or face challenges that stretch me

Go. Get. Wisdom. Let me ask you something as we are right on the brink of summer 2018:

What would it look like for you to do ONE thing this summer to arrange your life around the pursuit of real wisdom?

What if you took Solomon's charge to heart? What if you decided that you were going to re-arrange your whole life around the pursuit of wisdom:

your schedule, go looking for some friends who have real wisdom, go looking for wise mentors, go looking for classes, read great books, listen to new podcasts

Because here's the thing: no one drifts into wisdom! Wisdom almost never accidentally happens! That's why Solomon is calling his sons to be super-intentional about it!

As we were talking about this in my small group this past week and what it took to pursue wisdom

one thing that kept coming up over and over again was the discipline of **reflection**, pausing long enough to step back and consolidate your learning

Experiences are loaded up with the POTENTIAL to grow us up into wisdom, but the reality is that some of us have hard and miserable experiences and instead of becoming more wise we become more bitter and angry

What's the difference between someone who has a difficult experience and grows wise from it v. the person who grows more bitter and angry as a result of it?

The difference is often the willingness to carve out space to reflect, process, talk with a wise friend or mentor who can come alongside you and turn something potentially toxic into something beautiful and wise that will make you more strong and courageous

Reflection and processing—that requires intentionality, that requires deliberateness, that requires a teachable heart

What if you decided from this day forward, I'm going to take steps to chase after wisdom wherever that path might lead, whatever it takes, I'm going to go. Get. wisdom?

And what's one step you might take this summer to start to arrange and re-arrange your life around that glorious goal?

Now in this same chapter of Proverbs, a little further down, Solomon takes this big banner idea and gives us something really specific to do

Go get wisdom! Is Solomon's big idea, but he's got one particular place where that great life work might start.

And just like so much of the rest of the Bible, he starts with the heart of the matter—right at the heart:

**²³ Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it. [read together, repeat]**

Jesus loved this concept, he riffed off it all the time: at one point he said "a good person brings good things up from the good that's stored up in their hearts and an evil man brings evil out of the evil stored up in their hearts."

The image is a bit like a cellar stocked up full of food and an unexpected guest comes by. You don't have time to run the Piggly Wiggly to get food, all you got is what you got in the cellar

And if what you've got is moldy, stale, and gross, that's what you're going to offer

But if you've got wonderful fare, good food, great drink, and the stock has been regularly rotated and cleaned out and purged

old stuff tossed out and fresh new goodies put there, you're going to have wonderful good things to offer

So Solomon is talking to his sons, maybe they're still young, maybe early teens, maybe a little older in their 20's

And because they have so many decades of life ahead and perhaps they've only had limited opportunities for toxic stuff to get in there, he can say to them:

"Above all else, guard your hearts! Don't put any toxic stuff in there! Because everything you're going to do for the rest of your life will flow from what you put in your heart

INSTEAD, stock it up with GREAT stuff! Put great stuff in your heart and watch how it will bear great fruit in your life!"

If you're a student, middle school, high school, out of school recently, this is a fantastic verse to print out, draw up, make as your wallpaper or background on your computer

guard your heart! Keep destructive stuff OUT and put GREAT stuff IN. Everything you do will flow from that source!

If that's one of your most important jobs as a teenager, then you're going to work hard to put great stuff INTO your heart: great songs and great Scriptures and great conversations stored up in your heart, so that you've got good things stored up there

And then you're going to have to fight to keep some stuff OUT: You're going to be very careful about how you relate to social media, no matter how hooked in everyone else around you is.

Social media is going to make you discontent with your life if you let it. It'll suck you into the feeling that your life is boring and miserable while everyone else's life is awesome because all you're seeing is everyone else's highlight reel

So if you start to notice that every time you step away from your time on social media you feel angry or jealous or miserable or like your life is boring and lame

Then you need to FAST, take a break, unhook from social media, put firm boundaries around it.

WHY? Because you need to guard your heart, because every single thing you do will flow from it.

And if you are feeding your heart more and more and more DIScontent, you will bring that discontent to every relationship and every job and you'll be a miserable human being, not a wise one

Guard your heart, because everything you do is going to flow from it

So you're not going to view pornography, even if everyone else around you is. Why? Because once you put that in your heart it's really hard to get it out and everything else you do/how you relate to the people around you will flow from it

When it comes to relationships—guard your heart! Look for wise and wonderful people to hang out with and invite in!

AND You're not going to GIVE your heart away recklessly and foolishly to the first cute girl or cute guy that pays attention to you

You're going to GUARD your heart, be careful, be WISE, because if you rush to give your heart away you often get reckless with this valuable and precious possession and when you give your heart away to someone you give them TREMENDOUS ACCESS to your most prized and precious possession: your heart.

And if they're not wise, if they're not full of great character, if they're not a wonderful human being; if instead they're selfish or proud or smug or petty or gossipy or rude, then what are they going to deposit into YOUR heart that you give them?

Look: every single thing you do for the rest of your life is going to flow from this one precious, wonderful resources

So handle it with care! PUT GREAT stuff in there, stock up the storeroom of your heart with great things and Don't just give it away to any loser that comes along AND don't put anything in there that will come back to undermine you and your life and your actions later!

That's the call to those of you who are students or just out of school

Now the call is different to those of us who are older.

We still need to learn how to wisely and with faith, hope, and love guard our hearts—some of us never learned that along the way and our lives and our hearts are scarred because of it

So yes, by all means, if you haven't learned how to guard your heart, then do so.

But some of us, because we got burned along the way, aren't just guarding our hearts, our hearts are on total lockdown mode. Nobody gets in, we don't ever let ourselves really come out--because of the pain we've experienced and because we know the possibility of future hurt

I want to suggest that there's a HUGE difference between guarding your heart and putting your heart in lock-down mode

Lock-down mode is all fear-based, all protective, and totally isolating. You can't have real friendships, you can't have a real marriage, you can't have a real life if your heart is on lock-down mode

Lock-down mode isn't motivated out of faith, hope, and love, it's just fear and pain and therefore it can only lead you into the land of regret

When you're guarding your heart it leads you to wisdom because you aren't locking up your heart and throwing away the key

When someone or something comes along that is worth sharing your heart with or even giving your heart to, if you're GUARDING your heart you can always LOWER YOUR GUARD and let someone or something that is worthwhile, wise, and wonderful IN

There's a critical distinction between guarding your heart and putting your heart in lock-down, no one gets in mode. One is life-giving, the other will do nothing but rob you of life

The other complexity for those of us who are a little bit older is that the admonition to guard our hearts TODAY doesn't cover the toxic stuff we let in YESTERDAY

Or last week. Or last month. Or a year ago. Or a decade ago. Or three or four decades ago.

We didn't guard our hearts during the divorce, we let bitterness set in, and we're still carrying it.

We didn't guard our hearts when we lost that job and we let fear and anxiety set in, and we're still perpetually anxious about what might happen next

We gave our hearts away too quickly, too easily, to someone who wasn't trustworthy, who wasn't wise, who didn't have good in their hearts

And when we gave our hearts over to that person we gave them power to deposit THEIR toxic stuff into OUR hearts, and that voice still kicks up sometimes, we still do battle against their influence in our lives

Or we've already gotten sucked into pornography. Or the social media discontent age.

And it's already at work in our hearts, touching and coloring all sorts of relationships and our own struggles with contentedness.

If you've been on this planet for more than a couple of decades, good chances that something got into your heart that you'd love to or you need to get OUT of your heart

This isn't easy, but one of the greatest promises of the Scriptures is that at one point God says I'm going to GIVE YOU a new heart

To get there, there's an important first step for those of us who know that we've got all kinds of gunk in here: surrender. Open up.

Let the God who is love come into your heart and give that God full authority and permission to re-arrange and purge and cleanse and deal with whatever you've got in your heart

One of the primary ways that the Scripture talks about what God's doing in us is this renovation of the heart

And so we're invited onto this path that starts with surrender, giving God full and final authority to clean out the storehouses of our hearts—to clean some stuff out, to put some new stuff in its place, a new guard standing watch over the decisions we make

And that starts with surrender but once you let God's perfect love in, there might be stuff there that you need to deal with not just between you and God

You might need to confess something to someone that you've been carrying around in your heart.

You might need to ask your small group leader or a friend to get coffee and just process some of what's surfacing as you surrender to God's love mucking around and surfacing stuff in your heart

You might need to go see a professional trained counselor to work through some old baggage that you've been carrying around for years, maybe decades in your heart

And you might need to make some new decisions about what you're watching and what you're not watching, what you're reading and what you're not reading, what you're singing and what you're not singing

No matter how old you are, it's never too late to start to live and act wisely. And above all else, to guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Take-WITH:

What would it look like for you to do ONE thing this summer to arrange your life around the pursuit of real wisdom?

- ***"Guard your heart" work that needs to be done?*** New inputs/new boundaries, Surrender, Scripture memory, processing with a friend, counseling
- ***Summer better class?***