Chasing Wisdom: It's a Relay Race

Proverbs 4:1-9

When it comes to races, there's a huge difference between running a race solo and running in a relay race. Take the 400 meter individual race vs. the 4 x 100 meter relay race. In the individual race you simply run as fast as you can one time around the track. I don't want to sound too ignorant here. I know there's some strategy but it's just you and your legs getting you around that track as quickly as possible.

Not so with the relay race. The relay race requires that you work together with teammates and the most important moment of the race is the passing of the baton from one runner to the next. The one who started the race has to slow down and the one who is receiving the baton has to speed up, but not too fast. The baton has to be transferred seamlessly because if you drop it or fumble it, your race is over.

We're studying Proverbs 1-9 and we've called this series Chasing Wisdom. I think sometimes it's easy to think of chasing wisdom as an individual activity, but it's really a relay race. You receive wisdom from someone else and then you are responsible to pass it along to others. Imagine for a moment if a relay runner began the race with the baton and rather than transferring it to the next runner simply kept running and attempted to run the whole race by himself. That is not how acquiring wisdom works. It's a transfer or a relay.

The passage we will be looking at this morning functions as a summarizing passage for everything in chapters 1-3. Because of this, it's going to sound familiar. At first glance you may even think, well, Solomon is just repeating himself. But what sets this passage apart is the way in which Solomon shows his son how he received wisdom and is now passing it along to him.

To change the picture a little bit from a relay race, Solomon is holding a rope with someone ahead of him holding it and pulling him forward while Solomon reaches back and is pulling his son forward. Here's what we will see in Proverbs 4:1-9. **3 Actions Necessary for Us to Relay Wisdom to Others.**

1. **<u>Hear and Obey the Precepts of Wisdom (vv. 1-2)</u>**

Look at verse 1 with me. If you've been with us in Proverbs this probably sounds familiar. Keep in mind that most of chapters 1-9 are made up of lectures from a father to his son and they all begin pretty much the same way. They all begin with a direct address to the son. Listen to how the lectures in chapters 1-3 begin. Listen to 1:8; 2:1-2; 3:1 and 3:21. Each lecture starts with an exhortation and call to the son to pay attention and listen to the father's teaching, instruction, and wisdom.

But it's not just hearing with your ears. Notice the second part of verse 1. Be attentive. Hear and live out what you hear. Scripture is not a book of facts to memorize and this is especially true of Proverbs. Wisdom is skill at living and the knowledge we gain must be applied in order to grow in further wisdom. We've seen often in these chapters that we are warned not to forget. Do you know how you avoid forgetting? You act on the instructions you receive.

Listen to how James puts this in the New Testament. James 1:19-25.

Why is Solomon so passionate about his son hearing and obeying his instructions? Look at verse 2. The teaching is good, which means it's beneficial and one author said it "serves the family's interests."

If you are going to be a part of the relay race of wisdom, you have to grow and develop wisdom yourself. You can't give something you don't have, and this requires seeing wisdom's instruction as good and paying attention and obeying.

But here's the question that we need to ask, especially after all these lectures from Solomon so far in Proverbs. Where did Solomon get his wisdom? Well, it's easy to think because he was the wisest man in the world, God sort of just whispered it to him privately. But this isn't the case at all, and this is where we see the relay race of wisdom. Let's move on to our second action.

2. **<u>Receive and Pass On the Precedent of Wisdom (vv. 3-4a)</u>**

Look at verse 3. He mentions both of his parents and reflects on when he was "tender". This means that he was young and inexperienced. Anything but wise. And what happened? Look at the first part of verse 4.

This is how the relay race works. In Solomon's case it was his father, David, who taught him. Listen to 1 Kings 2:1-4.

3 generations involved here initially, but what does David tell Solomon that Solomon now tells his sons in Proverbs 4? We'll look at this in more detail later but notice at least the beginning in verse 4. Of course, it's not like David was pulling his instruction to Solomon out of thin air. Listen to Deuteronomy 8:1 and Leviticus 18:5. There's language like this and the constant reminder not to forget God's teaching throughout Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. David was simply passing along to Solomon what he had learned and been instructed in from those before him.

God set it up to work like this and to be a necessary part of the lives of His people. Listen to Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Obviously in ancient Israel the primary means of relaying God's commandments and God's wisdom from one generation to another was from parents to their children, but this isn't the only means. Listen to 2 Timothy 2:1-2. Now the church plays a vital role in this relay race of wisdom.

We learn all sorts of valuable life skills and information from our parents, friends, and mentors. But the main issue in Deuteronomy and in 2 Timothy is the transmission of the Word of God. This is the precedent of wisdom. You know that word precedent in a legal context. A legal precedent is a case that has already been decided and that now carries weight and influence on judges who rule on current cases. Scripture is the ultimate precedent, and we are constantly receiving it from those before us and passing it on to those behind us.

Sometimes you will hear people in our modern world speak about the Bible as this ancient and backward book that doesn't have anything to say of significance to us in the 21st century. "History is moving forward" they say and "we need to keep up with the times. We need to be relevant. To have something worthwhile to speak into our current cultural moment and a book written in a different culture and different time won't have much valuable to offer."

This is exactly the opposite of how we have something valuable to say to those around us in our current cultural moment. To truly offer someone wisdom you must say something very old, not something fresh and new.

"To be always relevant, you have to say things which are eternal." - Simone Weil (Semone Veigh)

And nothing is more eternal and more significant than the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Why? Because the gospel tells us the truth about ourselves and our world. We live in a broken and sinful world, and our biggest need is reconciliation with God and we are offered that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the true story of the world, and it always speaks with clarity, relevance, and wisdom into our lives no matter the age.

I want to argue that you can't understand the place and time you're in by immersion; the opposite's true. You have to step out and away and back and forward, and you have to do it regularly. Then you come back to the here and now, and say: Ah. That's how it is. - Alan Jacobs

You step out and away and back and forward by hearing the old, old story, again and again and by learning God's wisdom. And this brings us to our last action.

3. **<u>Know and Pursue the Prize of Wisdom (vv. 4b-9)</u>**

Solomon recounts the lecture he received from his father, David beginning at the end of verse 4 and going through verse 9. Let me read the whole thing to you. To understand what Solmon is passing on to his son, you need to see that there are two metaphors at work here. One in verses 5 and 7 and one in verses 6, 8-9. Notice in verse 5 and verse 7 you get the commands to "get wisdom" and "get insight." The word translated "get" can mean buy or acquire and it's taken from the financial or business world.

What are we to buy or acquire? Wisdom and insight. Wisdom is skill in living well and insight is discernment and understanding. Notice in verse 7 that he says, "whatever you get, get insight." The idea is that you should spend whatever money you have and liquidate whatever assets you can to get a hold of wisdom and insight.

Also notice the language in verse 7, “the beginning of wisdom is this, get wisdom.” We’ve seen the language of “the beginning of wisdom” back in 1:7. The idea here with this word beginning is the first thing. So, Solomon and David are starting at the beginning and giving us the first principle necessary to attain wisdom.

Our kids have gotten Legos over the years, and each Lego kit comes with an instruction booklet that takes you step by step through the process of building your masterpiece. Every build begins with step 1 and verse 7 is step 1 and it’s a bit surprising. It’s rather straightforward and blunt. *“What it takes is not brains or opportunity, but a decision. Do you want it? Come and get it.”* – Derek Kidner

And so, in verses 5 and 7 you’ve got the financial metaphor encourage you to know and pursue wisdom, but you’ve got a different metaphor in verses 6 and 8-9. I’ll read these and see if you can pick up on it. Love her, cherish her, and embrace her. One author called this an erotic metaphor and it’s quite clear that David was also helping his son to see wisdom as a bride to be pursued.

With the financial metaphor we saw that pursuing wisdom comes down to a decision to start. You don’t have to feel it to make that decision. But here, you have to learn to love wisdom. To want it. To see the value of it. And that’s why the benefits that she brings get listed here. Look again at verses 6, 8-9.

All the language of these benefits points toward a fullness of life and experience and not a restricting. One of the great lies of our age is that loving wisdom will lead to a life of toil and restriction. You won't be a fun person and you won't enjoy life. The only way to truly squeeze all you can out of life is to live for self. But this is fundamentally not true. She will exalt you, honor you, place a graceful garland on your head and a beautiful crown on you.

This morning we’ve seen a lot of the same language and the same messages that have been with us through the first 3 chapters of Proverbs. But this time the difference has been the necessity of receiving wisdom from those before us and passing it along to those behind us. Are you involved in this process? If you don’t know how to get involved, please make the decision to come talk to me or one of

our elders so we can help you start. And then you will grow to love wisdom and God's Word as you experience the change and benefits it brings. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 11/8/26

- Have you ever participated in a race of any kind? (running, car, horse, etc)

- What are some of the major differences between running and individual race and running a relay race?

- What makes Proverbs 4:1-9 similar to what we've seen in chapters 1-3 and what makes it different?

- The sermon quoted James 1, be doers of the word, not just hearers. What most often gets in the way between hearing something true and actually acting on it in your life?

- The sermon used the idea of a legal precedent, a past ruling that shapes future judgments, to describe Scripture. What does that metaphor tell us about the role the Bible should play when we pass wisdom to others?

- The sermon made the point that to offer someone wisdom you must say something very old, not something new. Why is this the case?

- What about the gospel makes it the most relevant news for any time period?

- The sermon shared a quote from Alan Jacobs that said we must "step out and away and back and forward" to truly understand our day and age. What would this look for you this week?

- What are the two metaphors given in verses 5-9 regarding pursuing wisdom?

- How do each of these metaphors help our motivation to pursue wisdom?

- The sermon quoted Derek Kidner who said, "*"What it takes is not brains or opportunity, but a decision. Do you want it? Come and get it."* What is the first decision you need to make to "get wisdom"?

- In what areas are you most tempted to believe that chasing wisdom will lead to a life of restriction and not fullness?