Chasing Wisdom: Two Roads Diverged – Proverbs 4:10-19

11/15/26

When we lived in central Virginia, our house was only about 30 minutes from the Appalachian Trail. If you aren't familiar with the Appalachian Trail, it's an almost 2200 mile trail that begins in Georgia and winds it's way through 14 states and ends up in Maine. Here's a little map of the trail.

In 2016, about a year before we moved here, I read a book about the trail and so I decided to take Cole, who was 7 at the time, out for a little hike on the trail. We hiked a couple of miles and while we were on it, we met some people who were Thru-Hikers. A thru-hiker is someone who begins in Georgia in the spring and plans to hike the entire 2200 miles before finishing in Mid-October in Maine.

About 3000 people attempt this each year and less than 1000 finish the entire trail. Here's a picture of the starting point in Georgia and then it's one long, continuous walk that is marked all the way north. People do veer off the trail at times, but the whole thing is defined and well-marked. If you follow the signs, you can be assured that you are on the right path.

So far in Proverbs we've seen wisdom compared to a path or walk. Listen to Proverbs 2:6-9. But there's another path that people choose to walk on and the signs on this other path are also clear. Listen to Proverbs 2:11-15. And so we've seen wisdom and foolishness presented as two paths here in Proverbs but our passage for today takes this idea of two paths and centralizes it. Let's glance briefly through the text and notice how many times this passage speaks of walking, paths, and ways.

What does the path metaphor tell us? It tells us that life is a journey, there is no quick fix, and we take it one step at a time with constant, moment-by-moment recommitments to the way of Christ. As we go forward on this path, the sage has a warning for us, and he has hope for us.- Ray Ortlund

These warnings and this hope come in the form of signs meant to keep us on the path. And we'll see these signs today in Proverbs 4:10-19. **4 Signposts to Guide You to Choose the Wise Path of Life.**

1. **<u>The Stable Walk of Wisdom (vv. 10-13)</u>**

The title for this morning is taken from a Robert Frost poem. In the poem the author stands at a fork in the road and tries to decide which path to take. In his case there are no signs and the roads don't seem to be that much different to him. He would like to take both, but ultimately must choose one, and in the end he says choosing the road less traveled made all the difference.

In our situation there are two paths clearly defined and we have signs at the front that tell us where these paths lead. Choosing the path of wisdom leads to a stable walk and life. Choosing this path requires listening to instruction from those who have walked the path before us. Look at verse 10.

You can see the standard beginning to a lecture given here by Solomon to his son. He wants him to listen but notice this time he tells him to accept his words. We've talked before about how you must hear and act on what you hear, but the step in between hearing and acting is internalizing or accepting. This requires you to slow down, pause, and think about what you hear. Everything in our world wants to speed up our intake of information and the way we move through life. We don't take the time to think, work through, or consider what we hear.

And so, rather than internalizing and digesting, the words we hear bounce off and make no lasting impact. And so we miss out on the benefits. Look at the second part of verse 10. The idea here is not a guarantee or a fool proof promise, because there are exceptions. But the point is that God's wisdom works in the world and typically good things come on the path of wisdom.

The call to hear and accept here is a call to walk on the way of wisdom. Look at verse 11. This metaphor of walking the path of wisdom is helpful in two major ways. First of all, it shows us that wisdom is a very practical, functional, day to day reality. Your walk is the typical order and structure of your life. What will you do this afternoon, tomorrow, and the next day? How will you use your time? What decisions will you make? The way of wisdom allows God's Word and wisdom to shape those daily decisions and uses of time. But second, the way of wisdom is not new. It's a well worn path.

Keep in mind what we saw last week at the beginning of Proverbs 4. Solomon passed on what he had received. The path of wisdom has defined boundaries and limits. It's clear and has been marked out for centuries. It's been traveled by many before us, and we get direction and guidance from them. And this leads to stability. Look at verses 12-13.

Notice that language at the end of verse 13. She is your life. In other words, wisdom will be the animating force of your life. It will be what gives you direction, purpose, motivation, and it will be what gets you up in the morning to walk the path that day.

I was listening to a podcast this week that was talking about the impact of technology and the internet is our lives and how we often think everything was awesome before cell phones and that the technology is the problem. This podcast made the case that many people had already lost purpose, direction, and their way, and then cell phones and digital technology has attempted to fill the void that was already in us. I think that's right. Wisdom is your life and her path leads to stability, direction, and purpose. But there's another path available to each of us.

2. **<u>The Enslaving Path of Foolishness (vv. 14-17)</u>**

Look at all the warnings from Solomon to his son and to us in verses 14-15. 6 different commands. Picture yourself standing at that fork in the road with two options and two signs clearly designating the paths in front of you. Solomon makes it abundantly clear that choosing this path is not a good option. In fact, he says not to even enter onto it. Don't try it out for a while.

What would it look like practically to enter the path of the wicked? What are the entry points? Certainly, bad influences in our lives, the wisdom and views of the world around us, but entry onto the path could also be more subtle choices toward foolishness. Listen to Proverbs 6:9-11. Laziness, apathy, and just the desire for ease and comfort are an entry point to the path of the wicked. Listen to Proverbs 6:12. Crooked speech. Gossip and slander set our feet on the path of foolishness. Notice verse 15 again. Turn away from it. If you find yourself on it, get

off it quickly. Why? Verses 16-17. Here are the reasons why we don't want to walk on the path of the wicked.

The wicked are so wrapped up in their way of life that they can't even sleep because of it. They are enslaved to it, and their lives have become a harm and hindrance to others and they can't stop. Notice in these verses that even their every day, normal activities are consumed by their foolishness and harm of others. Eating and drinking. They can't get away from the path they have chosen and it's a self-centered, and self-consumed path. It's a compulsion now.

Solomon is putting a signpost up for us here and warning us, sin will consume you. When you start walking on the path of the wicked, you will not be easily able to turn around and get off it. It takes over your thinking, your desires, your everyday activities, and you are no longer in control. Listen to John 8:34. The slavery doesn't happen all at once. It's a slow closing in and controlling and most of us don't notice. Unless God intervenes in our lives and brings us to see the glory of wisdom.

3. **<u>The Increasing Awareness of Wisdom (v. 18)</u>**

Look at the contrast in verse 18 to what we've just seen in verses 14-17 concerning the path of the wicked. I often go out to run early in the morning before the sun is up. When I start there will be the beginning of the sunrise that I can see off to the east, but it's still quite dark. I'll run for 30 or 40 minutes and when I get back it is completely light. But as I run, I don't really notice the shift is happening.

This is how the path of the righteous work. You see the signpost and get on the path and it's somewhat light. You see some truths about yourself, about God, and about the way life works, but you can't see all clearly. As you walk, the light shines brighter, but you may not even notice that you are seeing better. You just are. Things just start to fall into place and make sense. The further you walk, the more you see. And so, verse 12 begins to work out in your life.

The path of wisdom brings an increasing awareness to our lives and keeps us from stumbling or tripping. It also helps us stay on the path of wisdom, which we are already on. But the opposite is true of the path of wickedness.

4. **<u>The Confusing Darkness of Foolishness (v. 19)</u>**

Look at verse 19. Nothing about the path of foolishness gets clearer. Notice that they do not know what they stumble over. Life gets hard and decisions are made and they can't even tie a decision to the negative consequence that came from it.

Scripture consistently speaks of the minds and hearts of the wicked as covered in darkness. Listen to Romans 1:21.

Verses 18-19 are meant to be read together as the conclusion to Solomon's presentation of these two roads. Notice the use of the word like comparing the two paths to light and darkness. One road brings greater clarity, understanding, and knowledge that leads to stability and the other road brings growing confusion, conflict, and difficulty.

Now, this morning as we've talked about these two roads it's easy to kind of picture each of us as standing at that fork in the road with a choice in front of us. There's some truth to that on a day to day basis, but it's important to keep in mind that we were born into this world walking on one of these two paths. Listen to Ephesians 2:1-3. Spiritual deadness means walking on the path of wickedness and foolishness with the result that we were under God's judgment and wrath.

But if you go down a few verses in Ephesians 2 and get to verse 10 a different walk is described. Walking in good works. That sounds a lot like the path of wisdom and light. If we are all born on the path of deadness and judgment because of our sins, how does one end up on the path of good works and light? Well, listen to Ephesians 2:4-7. It begins with God's mercy and love which sent Jesus Christ to die for us. All of this is His grace given to dead sinners through Christ. The goal of this is that we would be with Him forever as new creatures on the path of light and wisdom, but this doesn't happen because we simply decide to get on the right path. Look at verses 8-9. The only way to get on the path of light and wisdom which ends in good works is to be saved by God's grace through faith.

The path of wisdom is not a path of trying harder, doing better, or being a more moral person. The entrance to that path is Jesus Christ according to John 14:6. The only way to the Father is through Him and it's received by faith.

If you have been clinging to your own goodness, works, or wisdom, I hope this morning you will see the mercy and grace of God given in Christ and turn to Him by faith. If you are already a believer in Christ, keep trusting Him as you walk and the path gets brighter and brighter. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 11/15/26

- What's the best hike you have ever been on?

- The sermon quoted Ray Ortlund saying that the path metaphor tells us, "life is a journey, there is no quick fix, and we take it one step at a time." What else does thinking of life as a path or journey help you understand?

- Describe a time when wisdom has brought stability and security to your life.

- What was the alternative; what would it have looked like to handle that situation without wisdom?

- What's one practical way for you to slow down and internalize the information (Scripture, sermon, even news) you receive this week?

- The sermon argued that wisdom is a well-worn path traveled by many before us. What might it look like for you to receive wisdom from previous travelers on the path?

- What are possible ways to enter the path of foolishness?

- Which entrance are you most susceptible to right now?

- The sermon said sin starts as a choice and slowly becomes a compulsion, you are no longer in control. Where have you seen that pattern play out, in your own life or someone else's?

- Give an example of how growth in wisdom has increased your awareness in a particular area.

- Verse 19 says the wicked 'do not know what they stumble over.' What does that tell us about how foolishness affects a person's ability to see their own situation clearly?