

Proverbs 4:1-6

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/prov/prov-4/proverbs-41-6/>

Solomon continues to proclaim the value of wisdom by introducing a testimony from the time of his youth.

Solomon addresses his audience as a *father* to his *sons*. In the previous chapters, this was used in a close up, one—on—one type of encounter. A *father* to a *son*. But here *sons* is used in the plural for the first time, as Solomon opens chapter four with the admonition *Hear, O sons*. In his opening, Solomon has zoomed out and is speaking to a communal audience rather than to each individual heart. Solomon is making clear that this message is for all. However, because of the familial nature, each *son* is still being addressed with the same care.

While the first few chapters were a sort of philosophical rationale to walk in the ways of wisdom, Solomon here applies another tactic: a personal testimony.

He sets it up with strong command language—*Hear* and *give attention*. He is collecting the audience back into his central point, as if he is saying “I know we’ve been trumpeting the importance of wisdom for three chapters, but do not stop hearing it!” He says: *Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, and give attention that you may gain understanding*. After three chapters of introduction to The Book of Proverbs, he is doing a kind of check-in, reminding them of the purpose of continued focus and listening—*that you may gain understanding*.

It is an important part of Solomon’s message that wisdom is not something we must do alone. It is gained from somewhere. Ultimately wisdom comes from God. But ideally it comes from *father* to *son*. From parent to child. The *father* says to the *sons*, *I give you sound teaching*. Children need to be instructed in the way of wisdom. We are created for wisdom, but we still require instruction to learn it. Trusting in our own reason or intuition is imperfect. We need additional resources to help us figure out how to properly guide and aim our reason and intuition.

The *teaching* Solomon has to *give* is *sound*, or good. It is beneficial. Helpful. It is in our best interest to follow. We *abandon* it to our own peril. When Solomon warns, *do not abandon my instruction*, the Hebrew word for *abandon* is “*azab*” (the same word used in Chapter 3; [see notes on Proverbs 3:1-4](#)), which means “leave” or “depart.” Once received, wisdom requires ongoing diligence. Without focus and intention, we drift. Without continued energy and effort, we become complacent. We *abandon instruction* when we lack diligence and lose sight of its value.

And the word for *instruction* in the phrase *do not abandon my instruction* is the word “*towrah*”, often translated as “law.” It is where we get the term *Torah* to describe the first five books of The Bible. So this is not talking about some abstract or vaguely defined *instruction*; it is the practical steps laid out earlier in the Old Testament. In essence, Solomon is saying, “Do not *leave* what you’ve already been taught”. As Jesus will later state, the entire Law is summed up with the

commands to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). This is the outworking of wisdom.

Solomon's personal testimony begins in verse 3: *when I was a son to my father, tender and the only son in the sight of my mother*. This testimony is about when his *father* taught him wisdom. The *father* (Solomon) of The Book of Proverbs was once a *son* who was young; of an age that was *tender*. His father was King David. So apparently this is an insight into how King David engaged with Solomon, to teach him wisdom. The Bible calls David a man after God's heart (1 Samuel 13:14). The fact that David's heart was to instruct Solomon's heart might tell us something about God's heart—He desires to teach His children to walk in wisdom.

Thus, the lineage of how to live life well is passed from generation to generation. This is not something new Solomon has made up for his audience. It is the true way of the world and has been since time eternal. Since Solomon's father David was described as a man after God's own heart, this could be a testimony meant to reinforce the authority from which Solomon speaks (from which he also learned). It might also be a way to identify himself with his audience—to put himself in the shoes of his readers. He was once there, hearing these teachings and wrestling with these truths.

He alludes to being *tender* (gentle) and cared for by his *mother*. This is to cast him in the role of a youth, naïve and unknowing of the true nature of reality (a juxtaposition to his current status as teacher). *He taught me and said to me*; the teacher was once the pupil. And it is inferred that one day these pupils will become teachers to the next generation. The Law that they ought to already know admonishes each *father* to teach the law diligently to their *sons*:

“These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”
(Deuteronomy 6:7)

Not surprisingly, Solomon's father David said the same thing to him he has been saying the last couple of chapters—*let your heart hold fast my words. Keep my commandments and live*. The teachings of mentors, fathers, and even God need to be taken into each *heart*. We need to develop our own sense of wisdom by not only hearing, but also applying what we learn. Believing it and trusting it. *Keep* it. *Live* it. Within our deepest sense of self, we have to commit to the path of wisdom. Walking in wisdom is a decision.

When we *keep the commandments* of wisdom passed down through the generations, we will *live*. This is not just about survival, a promise for prolonged breath. It is revealing the path of life, the true way to *live*. Thriving rather than just getting by. To truly experience the joys and peace and opportunity of human existence during our brief days on this earth.

Solomon's father pled with him as he is now pleading with the *sons* of his audience. *Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding!* The word for *acquire* is the Hebrew word “qanah.” The root means “to create, to buy, to possess or own.” “Qanah” is a diverse word that covers all sorts of

ways we “get” things. The message is clear—go after wisdom, whatever it takes, whatever you can do.

Solomon continues this testimony by telling how his father told him not to *forget* or *turn away from* these teachings. We can quickly leave the pursuit of wisdom for other things. We can confuse the means for pursuing wisdom (such as knowledge or wealth) for the end itself. Over time, as our patterns develop and reinforce, we can forget about wisdom altogether and choose to trust other things. We can be induced to believe that worldly recognition, money, or some other achievement is the very nature of wisdom itself. This is why the plea of Solomon’s teacher is *do not forsake her* (wisdom), *and she will guard you*. Wisdom is and always will be a source of protection, security, and safety.

Being derailed from wisdom can lead to all sorts of addictive behavior, discontent, and a host of other personal and relational turmoil. It is against this chaotic life from which wisdom *will guard you*.

If we trust, commit to, and indeed *love her*, Wisdom will *watch* over us, guiding us into the way that is truly *life*. The promise is *love her and she will watch over you*. A *life* of meaning and purpose rooted in truth is our reward for trusting God, choosing wisdom, and living in alignment with the eternal reality of the created order.

Biblical Text

**Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father,
And give attention that you may gain understanding,
2 For I give you sound teaching;
Do not abandon my instruction.
3 When I was a son to my father,
Tender and the only son in the sight of my mother,
4 Then he taught me and said to me,
“Let your heart hold fast my words;
Keep my commandments and live;
5 Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding!
Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth.
6 Do not forsake her, and she will guard you;
Love her, and she will watch over you.**