

Proverbs 4:20-27

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/prov/prov-4/proverbs-420-27/>

The heart is the source of life and we ought to fill it and guard it with wisdom, focusing our gaze and attention on the pathways of God.

Solomon is now working into a closing statement for this particular line of teaching. Chapter 4 has consisted of a personal testimony and a description about the two paths of life—wisdom or wickedness. He has built the case for wisdom with his personal testimony and a description of the choice between two paths in life; these closing remarks are an attempt to persuade the youth audience, in light of his presented evidence, to choose the way of wisdom.

In language similar to what he used immediately following his personal testimony ([see notes on Proverbs 4:10-13](#)), he addresses his audience as *my son*, and—for the sake of emphasis—resets the table.

He is calling the youth into diligence. *Give attention to my words, Incline your ear to my sayings.* In other words: lean into these teachings. The *sayings* (or *words*) that are to come are the wellspring of life. Don't miss them. Don't let them pass you by. Don't let your mind wander. This is too important. It is (the experience of) life or death. Truly listen to what I have to share. *Incline your ear* to these proverbs (*sayings*). Don't be distracted by something else. Focus on what we are talking about. It is not adequate to give a cursory nod toward this; it is the very essence of life and deserves total focus.

These proverbs are to be kept in mind continuously—*do not let them depart from your sight*, but keep them *in the midst of your heart*. Solomon calls on each *son* to make a choice. We can't completely control what thoughts come into our mind. But we do have a choice of what we dwell on. Solomon urges each *son* to *keep* these words of wisdom continuously in their *sight* and *in the midst of their heart*. By application, this would mean that as thoughts present themselves to the son's mind, the *son* can evaluate whether or not they are true by comparing them to the wisdom he has absorbed.

This process requires an ongoing intentionality. A continual evaluation and choosing to dwell on what is true, rather than what is false. This is not the kind of information to put on a shelf in case of emergency. It is the kind of instruction needed for every moment, every opportunity, every choice.

These sayings are *life to those who find them* and *health to their body*. This is for you! Not obligatory rules. Not a box you must fit yourself into. But beneficial instruction. The path to become all we were created to be; there is no other way to fulfillment than to complete the purpose for which we were created.

Wisdom is the key to reality, the secret to discovering your own best self-interest and living a life of meaning. By being exposed to these proverbs, you have discovered them, but if you forget

them just as quickly as you catch them, what use are they? You truly find it by internalizing the message and taking continual action to walk in the way of righteousness.

Righteousness, or uprightness, is simply walking in the ways ordained by God for our best. It occurs when there is harmony between our actions and God's design for us. The way of wisdom leads to inner peace, as we are aligned with our purpose. It leads to harmony with the mission God assigns each person. In each case, nothing stands in the way; we can choose to walk in the way of wisdom. Our only obstacle is our own poor choices.

For this reason, Solomon calls his audience to *watch over your heart with all diligence. From it flows the springs of life*. When we choose to dwell on wisdom, our *heart* is transformed by wisdom, and *life* will flow from the choices we make as we walk in wisdom's way. We are not promised particular circumstances we might deem desirable, but *life* itself. This *life* is what we long for in our innermost being. It transcends physical circumstances.

Wisdom brings trueness to our existence. And this has an effect on our physical health. Wisdom not only brings *life* to our souls, but *health to our body*. This can occur for many reasons. One is because we are not carrying the weight and stress of fighting against reality. Wisdom leads us to better stewardship of our bodies, and helps us avoid addictions. This is not a promise that we will never be ill or never suffer physically; it is after all "appointed for men to die once" (Hebrews 9:27). It is rather a general principle that, all things being equal, people who live wisely will have better physical health than people who do not.

The *springs of life* is a picture of prosperity. In the ancient world, *springs* of water brought abundance. Much of Israel experiences dry seasons, so *springs* were a precious resource. It meant a continual source of water for people as well as animals. In like manner, wisdom brings abundance to our spiritual life. Wisdom is a fountain of abundance. It leads us to our greatest possible fulfillment.

This is why we ought to *watch over our heart with all diligence*. Success in life is not about what happens to us externally. It is about our inner posture, our perspective. The way we manage our character and steward our own responsibilities. Who we become, and what we do with what we are given. The *heart* is the control-center, where we make our evaluations and choices. This is why we need to have great *diligence* to fill our *heart* with wisdom.

If the *heart* is the center, the spring from which all else flows, it makes sense for us to guard it. We guard it by minding the pathways to it. The Apostle Paul spoke of this, when he exhorted his spiritual children in Corinth to take "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Solomon instructs the youth to *put away from you a deceitful mouth and put devious speech far from you*. *Speech* creates thoughts. *Speech* that is *deceitful* clogs the pathway for the wellspring to flow (in both directions). Solomon urges each *son* to *put devious speech far from them*. Do not let it in (or anywhere near you) or you run the danger of your *heart* getting poisoned.

This of course means each *son* needs to be able to discern between what is true and what is *devious*. Enter wisdom once again. This is one of the core functions of wisdom; wisdom leads us to be able to discern what is real from what is fake.

A *deceitful mouth* and *devious speech* are not just clogs but distractions. They keep us from what we ought to be focused on. Lies and manipulation, devious talk and deceit all lead us astray from the way of wisdom. If the *springs of life* do not flow, evil flows. In place of *life* and goodness we get springs of lust and evil. Sin is not a mere list of forbidden acts; it is separation from God and His ways. It is the evil path, which leads to our own destruction. It separates us from the purpose for which we were created, and ultimately leads us not only to separation from other humans (who we ought to be in harmonious community with), but also separation from ourselves. It is a death (separation) that is the loss of who we were meant to be.

Since we tend to go where we are looking, Solomon tells us to *look directly ahead, let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you, and watch the path of your feet*. All three of these are about keeping to the vision of wisdom; focusing on the path God has for us rather than believing we can find and traverse a better way. If we heed Solomon's proverbs and stay committed to the path of wisdom, our *ways will be established*. In other words, if we focus forward, we will go forward. If we keep our heart and eye and mind on wisdom, we will act wisely. We will follow the path set before us if we keep our *eyes* on the path. All of this requires ongoing intentionality and a continuous investment of effort. This harkens back to verse 7, where Solomon said *the beginning of wisdom is to make a firm choice, a commitment to acquire wisdom*.

We will only *turn to the right or the left* if we make the choice to look to the *right* or the *left*. The word *turn* in the first part of verse 27 is the Hebrew word “natah,” which literally means “extend.” It has an undertone of drifting, the kind of thing you do when your gaze turns from one fixed point in the distance to a different one. It might bring to mind losing focus, neglecting to continue our investment of effort to continue *directly ahead* on the path of wisdom.

In the second part of the verse, we see the English word *turn* again, but this time it is the Hebrew word “cuwr,” which means “depart”, “avoid”, or “turn aside.” So, we should avoid *drifting to the right or the left* and if we find ourselves off-center, repent and *turn* back to the straight way of wisdom.

Biblical Text

**My son, give attention to my words;
Incline your ear to my sayings.
21 Do not let them depart from your sight;
Keep them in the midst of your heart.
22 For they are life to those who find them
And health to all their body.
23 Watch over your heart with all diligence,
For from it flow the springs of life.
24 Put away from you a deceitful mouth**

And put devious speech far from you.

25 Let your eyes look directly ahead

And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you.

26 Watch the path of your feet

And all your ways will be established.

27 Do not turn to the right nor to the left;

Turn your foot from evil.