

## PROVERBS 4: 10-27

- <sup>10</sup> Hear, my child, and accept my words,  
that the years of your life may be many.
- <sup>11</sup> I have taught you the way of wisdom;  
I have led you in the paths of uprightness.
- <sup>12</sup> When you walk, your step will not be hampered;  
and if you run, you will not stumble.
- <sup>13</sup> Keep hold of instruction; do not let go;  
guard her, for she is your life.
- <sup>14</sup> Do not enter the path of the wicked,  
and do not walk in the way of evildoers.
- <sup>15</sup> Avoid it; do not go on it;  
turn away from it and pass on.
- <sup>16</sup> For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong;  
they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble.
- <sup>17</sup> For they eat the bread of wickedness  
and drink the wine of violence.
- <sup>18</sup> But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,  
which shines brighter and brighter until full day.
- <sup>19</sup> The way of the wicked is like deep darkness;  
they do not know what they stumble over.
- <sup>20</sup> My child, be attentive to my words;  
incline your ear to my sayings.
- <sup>21</sup> Do not let them escape from your sight;  
keep them within your heart.
- <sup>22</sup> For they are life to those who find them,  
and healing to all their flesh.
- <sup>23</sup> Keep your heart with all vigilance,  
for from it flow the springs of life.
- <sup>24</sup> Put away from you crooked speech,  
and put devious talk far from you.
- <sup>25</sup> Let your eyes look directly forwards,  
and your gaze be straight before you.
- <sup>26</sup> Keep straight the path of your feet,  
and all your ways will be sure.
- <sup>27</sup> Do not swerve to the right or to the left;  
turn your foot away from evil.

The teaching of this passage of Proverbs is fairly simple. But the didactic creativity of how the teaching is conveyed is brilliant. The use of a key metaphor pairings such as a “way” and a

“path” throughout, as well as reference to parts of the body and more, help reinforce the basic teaching that wisdom is to be prized above all other valuables and gains in life. Lose wisdom and you lose what truly matters.

But how may wisdom be lost? What threatens wisdom from growing in us and growing strong and secure in us against those temptations and currents that can drag us down, confuse us and push us into making bad decisions that come from poor thinking, fear, anxiety, anger, frustration, impatience and despair? Proverbs doesn't spell it all out, but the metaphorical language enlarges our imagery so that we can insert ourselves in all the particular challenges that threaten the growth of wisdom in us with ever deeper roots.

Let's look at some of the metaphors in this passage, then, shall we?

As already noted above, a key set of metaphors that link the whole passage together is the pairing of “the way” and “the path” of wisdom pursued by the “upright” (those with integrity) and the “righteous” (those committed to justice) versus the way and the path of the wicked who walk crookedly, cause others to stumble and commit violence. They are also devious in their speech. When you say things about someone or say anything, for that matter, does it come from love, care and a desire for justice? Or, is it tinged with judgement, vengeance and a desire to put someone down and humiliate them because of what they have said or done? Sometimes we just need to vent and share our frustration with someone we trust and someone who is on our side. But when does such venting become a way of forming intimacy with someone over against someone else to their detriment, isolation and harm?

Finally, consider the bodily metaphors in the last section (20-27) and how they enhance the simple message about pursuing wisdom, experiencing her benefits and avoiding the alternatives. There is ear, sight and heart (20-21), life, healing and flesh (22), heart and the flowing of the springs of life (23), speech and talk (24), eyes and gazing (25), path and ways (26), swerving, walking and feet (27). There is rhythm to the poetry and the metaphors all reinforce the message in ways exquisite to recite and easy both to memorize and internalize.

Wisdom may be a challenge to pursue consistently when we are tempted to swerve away from it, but the language of this passage with “the way” and “the path” it points to, seeks to enhance wisdom's value and desirability for living a good life. What do you think?

**PRAYER:** Thank you, O God, for sending us inspiration toward wisdom. Thank you for words and poetry that help remind us of who and whose we are at our core. You have made us for wisdom, the wisdom that comes from love. Deepen such wisdom in us. Root us ever more deeply so that we are not swayed so easily or drawn in by temptation to swerve this way and that. Make our paths straight even as we are pushed and pulled by other ways. In Jesus' name; Amen.