

# Spiritual Flourishing

*May 31, 2026*

## Lesson Summary

### Main Passages

Proverbs 4:1-27

### Session Outline

1. A Father's Example (Proverbs 4:1-9)
2. Two Ways of Life (Proverbs 4:10-19)
3. The Straight Path (Proverbs 4:20-27)

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### Theological Theme

We flourish spiritually when we carefully follow God's commands and will for our lives.

### Call to Action

Assess where you may be out of step with God's will and take steps toward following Him more closely.

# Spiritual Flourishing

### Introduction

With an impressive 14 Olympic medals to her name, Katie Ledecky is the most decorated female U.S. Olympian of all time. Factor in the fact she holds 21 World Championship titles, and it's clear that she's one of the greatest swimmers of all time.<sup>1</sup> She is already one of the best, and her career is far from over!

So, how does one go about becoming such a renowned swimmer? While genes and passion certainly help, a key to success is, of course, really (really) hard work. After the Paris Olympics, Yahoo! Sports<sup>2</sup> reported that, to prep for that global stage, Katie had a strenuous training regimen, including:

- Swimming 10 times every week (racing against other swimmers for about two hours every training session)
- Hitting the gym 5 times every week (think: strength training, conditioning, weightlifting, and cardio workouts)
- Proper nutrition and good sleep

All in all, she was logging about 25-30 hours of training at the instruction of her coaches every week. The result? Her career is, clearly, flourishing. Katie knew she wanted to compete well at the highest level, and she directed her focus accordingly. She trained. She listened to her coaches. And it paid off.

This example has some parallels for the Christian life. Instead of “coaches” looking out for our wellbeing, we have a good and holy Father who, in His great love for us, has given us all the tools to live a righteous life. But, just like athletes are tempted to sneak in cheeseburgers and gym cheat days, we naturally drift in a direction that is bad for us, toward unrighteous living.

Today, we are kicking off a study in Proverbs about spiritual flourishing, which only happens when we keep our focus on the Lord.

- ❓ Have you had to implement a regimen to train for a goal? What did your training focus on?
- ❓ Why is it important we focus on the Lord in an intentional way?

## Session Summary

Today's passage, written by King Solomon, dispenses advice for right living. In it, Solomon wrote of the preciousness of wisdom and understanding, gifts only God can give, which come by walking closely with the Lord. Walking closely with the Lord is the only way we can walk on the right paths He intends for us. The good blessings He has for us come when fully follow Him.

### 1. A Father's Example (Proverbs 4:1-9)

- ❓ What was Solomon's focus in these verses?
- ❓ What do you know about Solomon's father? What type of wisdom might he have passed on to his son?

The book of Proverbs opens by introducing the author as King Solomon (Proverbs 1:1), son of David, whose wisdom, an incredible gift from the Lord, was great:

God gave Solomon wisdom, very great insight, and understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. —1 Kings 4:29-30

It would be wise, indeed, for his sons to listen to the wisdom he had share. We are wise, too, when we listen to the godly counsel of faithful believers who are further along in their lives and faith walk than us.

Solomon referred to his own father, David, who was known for being a faithful man after God's own heart (indeed, King David would go on to be the measuring stick against which future kings of Israel were judged by God; 1 Samuel 13:14; 1 Kings 15:3-5), and would have shared that faith with his children.

Notice the focus on wisdom. Scripture has much to say about wisdom and where to find it:


For the LORD gives wisdom;  
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. —Proverbs 2:6

### Father to Son

This chapter has all the urgency of a father's appeal to his son. The plea is that the boy learn right from wrong and stay in the right path for all his life. "Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding." It is as though father and son were in the marketplace and the father was urging the son to spend his money on wisdom rather than on anything else. The price is the son's whole life.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,  
and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. —Proverbs 9:10

Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all  
generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him.  
—James 1:5-6


 How would you describe wisdom? Since God is the source of  
all wisdom, what does this say about our need to stay close to  
Him?

The Lord gives wisdom. To have a healthy spiritual life, we need godly  
wisdom. We don't flourish in life without wisdom, and we don't get true  
wisdom apart from the Lord.

Solomon wrote of wisdom and understanding (not material things) as  
the most important things we can acquire in this life. The “garland” and  
“crown” in verse 9 symbolize favor from the Lord.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Two Ways of Life (Proverbs 4:10-19)

 What themes stand out in these verses?

 What practical guidance did Solomon give for pursuing  
wisdom?

Solomon warned against wicked living by describing two paths: the  
path of the wicked, and the path of the righteous. The wicked Solomon  
described here seem addicted to evil deeds. Look at all the things he  
described them doing:


- They can't sleep unless they do evil, unless they make another  
stumble (v.16).
- Wickedness is like food to them. Think about what it means that  
wickedness is their “bread,” they need it and keep feeding it into  
their lives (v.17).
- Violence is like wine in their lives, a drink of choice (v.17).

Evil. Wickedness. Violence. This is an unrighteous life lived apart from  
the Lord. These descriptors bring to mind Paul's list of fleshly desires in  
Galatians:

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral  
impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy,  
outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy,  
drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you

about these things—as I warned you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. —Galatians 5:19-21

We walk “the path of the wicked” (v. 14) when we give into the desires of our flesh. When left to our own devices, this is where we drift, like a car out of alignment that moves toward the ditch on the highway. But Solomon warned against this type of living by avoiding this path. Don’t travel on it at all; turn the other direction and pass it by. God desires a better life for us than this.

 What does it look like for us to avoid the path of the wicked in daily living?


Rather than follow the path of wickedness, Solomon advised following “the path of righteousness” (v. 18). Solomon sought to guide his audience “on straight paths” (v. 11). This calls to mind his father David’s words in Psalm 23:

He renews my life;  
he leads me along the right paths  
for his name’s sake. —Psalm 23:3

David spoke of the Lord as his Shepherd. Do you see the key to walking on this path—the right path? We only walk this path as we walk faithfully with the Lord. We follow His lead as a sheep follows a shepherd. This requires daily faithfulness. We don’t automatically hop to the path of righteousness and remain there when we are saved. Daily, we decide who we are going to follow, and only one choice leads us on the right paths. Only one choice leads us to spiritual flourishing. Are we going in that direction?

### 3. The Straight Path (Proverbs 4:20-27)

 What further instruction did Solomon give in these verses?


 What does it look like to “guard your heart” in daily life?

In the final section of Proverbs 4, Solomon focused on righteous living. He urged his readers to keep these teaching in their hearts (v. 21). He called these wise teachings “life to those who find them” and “health to one’s whole body” (v. 22).

Righteous living is good for us. Modern society often holds a view that God is a wet blanket, out to kill our otherwise fun and free lives. The Bible shows us something much different, though. The restrictive, damaging life is actually found on the other path. When we walk on the

path of the wicked, we are slaves to our sin. In Christ, we have freedom. Only the path of righteousness is life giving.

In Solomon's day, the heart was considered the location of knowledge and the source of all decisions.<sup>4</sup> Your heart could guide you on the path of the wicked, or the path of the righteous. We "guard" (v. 23) our hearts by keeping focused on the Lord, so we make righteous decisions.

 What is the connection between righteous speech and wise living? How have you seen speech create obstacles to righteousness?

Note the warning against dishonest and devious speech (v. 24) which has the power to steer our hearts and our steps in a wicked direction.

Guarding our hearts and making sure we are staying firmly on the path of righteousness is less about what we are keeping out and more about what we are letting in.<sup>5</sup> It means seeking the right path of the Good Shepherd and staying there. It requires us to keep our eyes fixed forward on the Lord. It requires us to carefully evaluate how we are living and making the next right choice. It requires us to keep on the path of righteousness and keep off the path of the wicked. It requires full focus on God and faithful obedience to what He is calling us to do. When we do this consistently, we flourish under God's loving care.

## Conclusion

In Proverbs 4, Solomon, son of David and the king most known for his wisdom, dispensed advice on how to live. He began by stressing the importance of wisdom and understanding, both of which come from the Lord. His memory of David telling him, "Keep my commands and live" (v.4b), advised him to walk closely with the Lord. This is the key to really living.

Solomon stressed that the wise path is the righteous one. He warned his readers to "keep off the path of the wicked" (v. 14). On this path is violence, wickedness, and evil, but, when left to our own devices, this is the way we drift, toward the selfish desires of the flesh. The path of righteousness is a choice, and to get there, we must submit our lives and actions to the Lord. This is the path of spiritual flourishing!

Staying on this path may be less about what we're keeping out and more about what we're letting in. We stay on the righteous path when we focus on God and making choices that honor Him and what He's asked us to do.

There are several things we can take away from Solomon’s teaching here. It’s good to have a wise mentor you can turn to for advice—someone who walks closely with the Lord and has seen more of the Christian life than you. We need wisdom and understanding, and we receive these by focusing on the Lord. Solomon wrote to his sons, telling them to listen to his wise teaching, and we should also look to our Father in heaven and listen to His wise teaching (which is wiser than any human teaching).

The right path is a daily choice of faithfulness, and the key is following the Lord. Focusing on Him. Listening to His advice. Following what Scripture teaches us about how to live. Deferring to Him when His will for your life diverges from your own. This devout, faithful following of Christ is the key to spiritual flourishing.

- ❓ What does it look like to seek God’s wisdom daily? Where are we tempted to seek wisdom apart from God?
- ❓ How do we encourage one another to seek God’s wisdom and righteousness on an ongoing basis?
- ❓ How does righteous living give us opportunity to share the gospel with others?

## Prayer of Response

*Thank God for giving us wisdom and leading us along the right paths, where we can truly flourish. Thank Him for the wisdom He has given in the pages of Scripture. Ask Him to point out any area of your life where you are tempted to stray from the right path and ask what He wants you to do about it. Ask that He would show your group the steps He wants you to take to flourish spiritually.*

## Memory Verse

*Don’t abandon wisdom, and she will watch over you; love her, and she will guard you. —Proverbs 4:6*

## Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Proverbs* by Daniel Akin and Jonathan Akin
- *Be Skillful* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Proverbs* by Raymond Ortlund Jr.





# Historical Context of Proverbs

## Purpose

Because these proverbs are in the Bible, they do not just entertain; they exhort, encourage, and offer hope. Solomon called readers, especially youth, to pursue wisdom rather than foolishness. He encouraged the inexperienced to become wise rather than mockers, to be teachable rather than incorrigible, to live rather than to die. He predicted that people who pursued wisdom would generally find success and happiness in this life, but he promised that they would absolutely find joy and blessing in eternity.

## Author

Solomon is credited with the proverbs in chaps. 1–29 of the book of Proverbs (1:1; 10:1). There is biblical evidence that Solomon was wise and a collector of wise sayings (1Kg 3:5–14; 4:29–34; 5:7, 12; 10:2–3, 23–24; 11:41). Chapters 1–24 may have been written down during his reign, 970–931 BC. The proverbs in chaps. 25–29 were Solomon’s proverbs collected by King Hezekiah, who reigned 716–687 BC (25:1). The last two chapters are credited to Agur and Lemuel (30:1; 31:1), about whom nothing else is known. An editor was inspired to collect the proverbs of Solomon, Agur, and Lemuel into the book we now have.

## Setting

The reign of Solomon represented the peak of prosperity for the nation of Israel. The period saw the greatest extent of Israel’s territory, and there was peace and international trade (1Kg 4:20–25; 10:21–29). It is likely Solomon knew about the ancient tradition of wisdom in Egypt (1Kg 3:1), but through inspiration and God’s gift he composed even better sayings (1Kg 3:12; 10:6–7, 23). Solomon addressed his teaching to his son or sons, but these inspired wise sayings are applicable to all people. The book of Proverbs, like the rest of the Bible, contains stories, teaching, and examples. People should make appropriate application of these truths to their own situations (1Co 10:11).

## Special Features

What is a proverb? A secular proverb seeks to state a general (not absolute) truth, such as “a fool and his money are soon parted.” It is typically pithy, that is, it is brief but rich in meaning: “No pain, no gain.” A proverb is practical; it gives advice that is useful in the real world: “A stitch in time saves nine.” It should be applied; the reader should consider what changes he should make in his own life in light of the proverb: “Charity begins at home.” A proverb is derived from astute observations about how life usually works; the creator of a proverb shows himself very knowledgeable and perceptive, able to see what is generally true and to draw conclusions from it: “The pen is mightier than the sword.”

## Extended Commentary

### Proverbs 4:1-27

4:1–2 These verses introduce a series of a father’s exhortations to his sons to pay attention to his instruction. See 4:20; 5:1; 7:24.

4:3 Being a true son implies obedience, not merely being a male child. A tender child is delicate as well as teachable. Precious means to be treated as if an only child (Jr 6:26; Am 8:10; Zch 12:10).

4:4, 6 To keep ... commands is to listen attentively, retain, and obey them; it could also be translated “guard.” Those who keep their way in godly wisdom (v. 21; 2:20; 5:2; 7:1–2; 8:32; 10:17; 16:17; 19:16; 22:5) will in turn be watched over and guarded by wisdom or the Lord (2:8, 11; 3:26; 6:22, 24; 7:5; 14:3).

4:5–8 Get translates a common Hebrew word for “purchase.” There is a great emphasis here that wisdom and understanding are the most important acquisitions (16:16; 18:15; 23:23; cp. 17:16)—literally “in all your purchasing, purchase understanding” (4:7), that is, spend all your assets on understanding. Supreme could also mean the beginning (1:7), the first thing to get. As with salvation, the cost of godly wisdom is not silver and gold. Rather, a person must stop desiring anything else and love ... cherish, and embrace only the one thing—that is part of what it means to give up one’s life for something. Paradoxically, the cost is both nothing and everything (Is 55:1; Mt 13:44–46; 16:24; 19:21, 27; Lk 5:11, 28; Php 3:8).

4:9 The garland and crown are symbolic of God’s grace and favor being visible in one’s life.

4:10–19 The wicked are addicted to doing evil—it is their refreshment and their nourishment (vv. 16–17). The son is exhorted to hold on to the good and warned not even to try the bad (vv. 13–15; cp. 1:15). Quantity and quality of life are the incentives (vv. 10, 13, 22; 8:35; see note at 3:22). The righteous increase in light while the wicked stumble in gloom (vv. 18–19; cp. Jb 29:2–3; 1Pt 2:9; Rv 21:23–24). The foolish wicked don’t know that there is a connection between sin and punishment (5:6; 7:23; 9:18; 28:22).

4:20–21 See note at 4:1–2.

4:23 Above all else is literally “more than all guarding.” To guard something is to make sure that it does not get away and that it is safe from attack. In Hebrew the heart is the location of knowledge and also the preconscious source of decisions (27:19; Mt 15:18). Your heart is who you are, the “true you” that directs all your thoughts and emotions. You can educate your heart (Pr 24:32)—consciously form and modify a worldview—after which decisions and actions flow from it (16:9, 23; Lk 6:45; Rm 10:10; 2Co 9:7). This education can be worldly, carried out by yourself, or godly, carried out by the Holy Spirit (Pr 2:6; Jr 24:7; Ezk 36:26–27; Ac 16:14; Rm 2:29). The inclination of your heart directs your mortal life and determines whether you enter eternal life (3:22).

4:24 While as a rule the heart determines what comes out of the mouth (see v. 23), false speech can eventually poison the heart.

4:25–27 Undivided attention to the right path (cp. 17:24; 27:20) and a determination not to even sample evil (cp. vv. 13–15; 1:15) assure that your ways will be established. The passive voice implies that it is God who does it. “Established” is fixed and firm, secure, not subject to change or to destruction (12:3; 16:3; 24:3; 25:5). Right or . . . left expresses the whole range of evil paths. That is not to say that a middle road, a compromise, is the good way, but that it is important not to leave the only good way.<sup>6</sup>

## References

1. <https://www.olympics.com/en/athletes/katie-ledecky>
2. <https://sports.yahoo.com/heres-exactly-katie-ledecky-training-154400317.html>
3. David K. Stabnow, “Proverbs,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
4. Ibid.
5. Christopher A. Beetham and Nancy L. Erickson, eds., *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible*, One-Volume Edition, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024).
6. David K. Stabnow, “Proverbs,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).