

**PROVERBS | DIRECTIONS FOR LIFE: WISDOM AND WICKED MEN**  
**PROVERBS 4:10-26; 24:15-18**  
**2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH**  
**SUNDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2010**  
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This morning, in our seventh of twelve teachings from **PROVERBS** we're going to look at several passages from **PROVERBS** and at other Scriptures from throughout God's Word that teach us about the differences between the **ways of wicked men**, and the **ways of God**. Solomon uses the term **wicked men** throughout **PROVERBS** to highlight that there are two different ways of thinking and living in this world. Here's an example of some of the **MAIN** differences Solomon is talking about and inviting us to learn more about from God's Word this morning.

**THE WAY OF WICKED MEN**

1. Is cynical and chaotic.
2. Is self-dependent.
3. Views *surrender* as a *weakness* that leads to *bondage*.
4. Views people as resources to be consumed.
5. Views the *here and now* as all we have.

**THE WAY OF GOD**

1. Is joyful and focused.
2. Is God-dependent.
3. Views *surrender* as a *strength* that leads to *freedom*.
4. Views people as valued by God, and therefore as valuable.
5. Views the *here and now* as needing to be informed by the *past*, while keeping a hopeful eye toward the *future*.

Now I know you know that our thinking and our desires, don't always line-up with God's thinking and God's desires, and so you might be asking yourself, "Why in the world is Gregg going to teach on something so obvious? I mean, I get this already!"

And if that kind of question is already beginning to go through your mind, less than one minute into this teaching, then let me give you some counsel. The reason I'm focusing on this topic this morning is because none of us ... not you and certainly not me ... none of us fully understands the importance of this topic, and the truths God's Word has for us in regard to it.

Yes, once we come into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ we start taking on more of the character of Jesus Christ, and as that happens, we learn how to live in God's will with greater consistency. But there isn't one of us who isn't still doing battle **ON A DAILY BASIS** with our own self will, with our sin nature, and with our desire to be in charge of our own lives. And like they say in AA, "When you choose to have yourself for a sponsor, you've got an idiot for a sponsor." Do you see it?

Friends, none of us can go through life on autopilot and not crash and burn. We were created to be shepherded by God, by His Word, and by the God-focused people we choose to make a part of our lives. It's about **SURRENDER TO GOD**. And without **SURRENDER TO GOD** there's no growth, no change, and no healing. And so with that introduction, let's turn to **PROVERBS 4** and begin ...

**PROVERBS 4:10-13 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)**

<sup>10</sup> Hear, my son, and accept my sayings, and the years of your life will be many.

<sup>11</sup> I have directed you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in upright paths.

<sup>12</sup> When you walk, your steps will not be impeded; and if you run, you will not stumble.

<sup>13</sup> Take hold of instruction; do not let go. Guard her, for she is your life.

**v. 11** ... I have directed you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in upright paths. ... Gang, if we're going to keep taking on the family-likeness of Jesus Christ ... if becoming more like Jesus in our **THOUGHTS, WORDS, DEEDS, PRIORITIES**, in how we **MINISTER** and **SERVE**, and in what we do with the **FINANCES** God has entrusted us with, then we have to have a growing awareness of how to identify, come against, and be victorious over the devil and his schemes.

Just thinking that God will help us once we've fallen into the ditch of sin, or when we get to the crossroads of temptation is a naïve way to look at what it means to follow Jesus Christ with undivided hearts and with a consistent passion for His holiness.

God isn't into on downloading His **truth, wisdom, and discernment** into us at the last second, "**Matrix Style.**" God wants you and me to learn more about His character, more about Jesus Christ, more about what it means to follow Him and stay in the center of His will, and become more discerning about good and evil **AHEAD OF TIME**.

God doesn't like it when we try to **CRAM TRUTH** in the midst of a crisis, or just around the corner from a crisis - the way we used to cram for a test the night before. **LISTEN TO ME** ... the crisis times in our lives are not the times to learn the Word of God, they're the time to live out, press into, depend on, and apply the Word of God. God wants to teach us to become more discerning about good and evil **AHEAD OF TIME** so we'll be equipped to choose His way and not the way of the world.

And again, this is why it's so imperative that parents work with God in the "training up of their children, so that when they're grown up, they won't try living life on their own strength, with their own plans, and according to their own human wisdom." (**PROVERBS 22:6** | PARAPHRASE). Because it will never, never work.

**v. 13** ... Take hold of instruction; do not let go. Guard her, for she is your life. ... Solomon is talking here about the responsibility you and I have to make right choices in the here and now - and to "**grab onto His instruction for us**". In fact, Solomon goes so far as to say that to fail to do this is **death** ... but that to do this is **life**. Not much of a choice. And I see the **FIRST FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

**FAITH LESSON ...**

God doesn't want to leave us unprepared for life. God wants to equip us, train us, correct us, and prepare our hearts and minds ahead of crisis, so that He can guide us **THROUGH THE CRISIS** and bring us out

on the other side stronger, focused, and healed, instead of ending up weaker, blurry, and broken.

Let's turn to **PROVERBS 4:14-18**, and read about the pathway the wicked walk.

**PROVERBS 4:14-18** (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

<sup>14</sup> Do not enter the path of the wicked and do not proceed in the way of evil men.

<sup>15</sup> Avoid it, do not pass by it; turn away from it and pass on.

<sup>16</sup> For they cannot sleep unless they do evil; and they are robbed of sleep unless they make *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, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day.

Believing the best of everybody isn't a virtue, but neither is being paranoid about everyone - assigning motives to folks, and never giving them the benefit of doubt before all the facts are in. Everybody isn't out to get you ... but neither is everybody innocent and deserving of your trust. And friends, God has another way He wants to teach His people - and that's the way of **WISDOM AND DISCERNMENT**.

**ILLUSTRATION** ... Pastor-teacher Chuck Swindoll tells a funny story about a lady at an airport who bought a little package of Oreo Cookies from a vending machine and sat down on a seat, and got out her laptop to do some work. Once she got settled, she opened the package of Oreos on the seat next to her and ate one. But then out of the corner of her eye, she noticed that the man in the next seat over reached over also ate one of her cookies. He didn't say anything. He just took one of her cookies! She could not believe it! How rude. The least he could do is ask for one. She took another, and so did he ... and they ate through that package of Oreos this way - silently pulling them back toward themselves after they each took another one. She was incensed.

When the package was down to just one more Oreo, the man snapped it in two, and pushed the final half back toward her. She was grateful he didn't eat the last one, but she left it there on the seat - not wanting to eat it after he'd touched it. Eventually their flights were called, and they both got up silently and walked away to their gates. As the woman got near her gate she reached into her purse to take out her Boarding Pass, and there it was - staring back up at her ... her new, unopened package of Oreo Cookies. And in horror she realized that the man hadn't been eating her cookies without permission, she had been eating his! Oh the danger of jumping to conclusions!

In June of 2008 when I was teaching through **JOHN 11**, and the incidents leading up to Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead, we studied some verses that speak to the way of **WISDOM AND DISCERNMENT** Solomon is talking about here - the way that will end

up leading us closer to God, instead of further away from Him ... that will equip us to wait to make decisions until God has given us all the facts.

In JOHN 11, word had come to Jesus and His disciples that Lazarus was *very sick* and so after waiting for a bit, they headed off for Bethany where Lazarus lived with his two sisters, Mary and Martha. Let's look at JOHN 11:9-10 ...

JOHN 11:9-10 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

<sup>9</sup> Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world.

<sup>10</sup> But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

The disciples didn't understand that even though Lazarus was dying, that as Jesus said, "**this wouldn't end in death**". They were confused and couldn't see the whole truth about what was going on. And the **night** Jesus was talking about here, this **darkness** that the disciples were walking around in was "**ignorance.**" And here's what I hear Jesus saying to His disciples and to us here this morning about this ...

I'm guided by a different Light than you. There's a Light that pierces through the night, right through the darkness of **IGNORANCE AND ASSUMPTION**... there's a Light I can use to help you change the whole way you look at yourself, at life, at other people, and at this world. It's the Light of the **WISDOM AND THE DISCERNMENT** of the Holy Spirit.

The disciples and Lazarus' family wanted Jesus to come to Bethany as soon as He received word that Lazarus was sick. But Jesus knew that there were Jewish Religious Leaders waiting there to arrest Him, and so He waited until the time was right. Yes, while He waited, Lazarus ended up dying ... and so to everyone around Him it seemed like His plan had failed and that Jesus was the one who was **wandering around in the dark ... that He was the One talking somebody else's Oreos**. But nothing could have been further from the truth.

Jesus was in the **light** ... in the center of God's **WISDOM AND DISCERNMENT**. And when His disciples trusted Him, they saw that His timing was perfect, and that if they wouldn't let go of Him, that they could walk in the **light**, just as He was in the **light**. And by staying in step with Him, they could avoid the pitfalls, the ruts, the slippery slopes, and the train wrecks that always show up in our lives when we choose to follow the **dark sinful plans of wicked men** instead of the **well-lit righteous plans of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ**. Here's another example of this same truth from *The Old Testament*.

In SECOND KINGS 6 there's a great story about the King of Syria. Every time the King made plans against the Jews and tried to ambush them, God set up an ambush against their ambush. In other words, God helped the King of Israel always stay a move or two ahead of the King of Syria.

When the King got to where he thought he was going to “wipe out the Israelites,” the Israelites were already there **AND IT WAS HIS TROOPS THAT GOT “WIPED OUT.”** And after this happened again and again, the King couldn't figure out what was going on. So finally, in **SECOND KINGS 6:11** he confronted his counselors and said ...

**SECOND KINGS 6:11** (PARAPHRASED)

<sup>11</sup> “There’s a traitor among us. Every time I give out my plans, one of you goes over to the Israelites and tells them what we’re going to do. There’s no other explanation for them knowing our plans every time. Which one of you is a spy?”

After a minute or so of wondering if being honest would lead to a longer life or to a shorter life, one of the men in this crowd of accused advisors said ...

**SECOND KINGS 6:12** (PARAPHRASED)

<sup>12</sup> Uh, Mr. King, Sir. I hate to tell you this, but you’re wrong. It’s not one of us. It’s Elisha, the prophet of the Israelites. You may not believe this, but he’s so close to his God that his God tells him everything you say - even the stuff you talk about in your bedroom.”

What a great example of exactly what Jesus was saying to His disciples 2,000 years ago by the Jordan River - and what He’s saying to us here this morning. We’ve got a spy in the enemy’s camp, and His name is the Holy Spirit! This is what Jesus is talking about in **JOHN 11:9-10** when He said that **there was light that shines in the darkness and that it can keep us from stumbling around in the dark.**

Jesus saw the big picture of what was going on because He lived a life of intimacy with the Holy Spirit and acted according to the direct leading of the Holy Spirit. And the same Holy Spirit who lived inside of and guided Jesus Christ, is available to you and me today. Jesus could have rushed into Bethany like everyone wanted Him to, but He would have ended up being arrested a week before Passover, which was the night that God had planned. But instead, Jesus waited, and listened to the leading of God’s Holy Spirit, and got the guidance He needed to stay in step with God’s timing.

And gang, when we’re staying in step with God, what looks to us, and to the world like “the end” is seldom “the end.” And when we say “Yes” to God, we begin “walking in and living in the Light” and the **KNOWLEDGE**, and the **UNDERSTANDING**, and the **WISDOM** that God has for us **WILL ONLY BEGIN TO CHANGE EVERYTHING.**

And I can see the Apostle John thinking back to this exact experience with Jesus, when as an old man he wrote a verse we looked at last Sunday ... **FIRST JOHN 4:4** ...

**FIRST JOHN 4:4** (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

<sup>4</sup> greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world!

Yes, Satan will still set obstacles in our path even when we’re walking in the Light. But isn’t it good to know that when Satan wants to ambush us, that we can ambush his ambush!? How often do you and I jump ahead of the Lord’s plan, or slack back,

behind God's plan? We've all done it. But here's the great deception ... sometimes when we make the choice to *walk ahead of* or *fall behind the LORD and His timing for our lives*, things still turn out okay. But let me assure you that whatever the outcome of *walking ahead of* or *behind the LORD and His timing for our lives*, **IT'S NOTHING COMPARED** to what *will happen* when we *stay in the light* and wait for the leadership and the timing of the Holy Spirit and then join God in what He's up to!

**PSALM 119:105 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)**

<sup>105</sup> God, Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

And here's our **SECOND FAITH LESSON** this morning ...

**FAITH LESSON ...**

When we don't know which direction to take, and when we don't know all the facts, and when we're not sure we've been told the whole truth, the Holy Spirit wants to reveal God's will to us. And as we surrender to God's guidance and timing, we will receive God's **WISDOM AND DISCERNMENT**, and be equipped to live in the center of God's will and God's plans. You wait. You trust. You watch. You'll see.

Okay, back to **PROVERBS** ... and let's see how Solomon's words connect with what we've been looking at so far morning.

**PROVERBS 4:19; 6:12-13 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)**

<sup>4:19</sup> The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know over what they stumble.

<sup>6:12</sup> A worthless person, a wicked man, is the one who walks with a perverse mouth,  
<sup>6:13</sup> who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, who points with his fingers;

Do you see that Solomon and Jesus are talking about the same thing? The word "worthless" is from the Hebrew root word *beliyall*, which has among its meanings, "the offspring of Satan." The Apostle Paul uses the Greek form of this word in **SECOND CORINTHIANS 6:15** when he writes ...

**SECOND CORINTHIANS 6:15 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)**

<sup>15</sup> What harmony has Christ with Belial [*Satan*], or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? [*emphasis added*]

The name *Satan* isn't found anywhere in the first twelve books of *The Old Testament*. Oh, the devil is there, he's just referred to by different names. *Satan* is the actual name of the devil. That's why the word "devil" isn't usually capitalized, but the devil's name *Satan* always is.

**PROVERBS 6:12-13 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)**

<sup>6:12</sup> A worthless person, a wicked man, is the one who walks with a perverse mouth,  
<sup>6:13</sup> who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, who points with his fingers;

So the way of the wicked, of those being led around through life by the devil, stumbling around in the darkness by their own sin nature, will always be a way of enticement and entrapment. Look again at v. 13 ... Satan will use everything at his disposal to entice, lure, and tempt us. Solomon says that Satan speaks with His feet - that is his feet are always moving, he can't stand still ... and that Satan even uses finger signs to accuse us and express his evil intentions. I bet you remember this happening when you cut that guy off while merging onto I-5 last week. Right?

Notice, v. 12 also says that wicked people also have perverse mouths. This isn't talking about cussing once in a while. Solomon is saying that a dirty mouth is one of the evidences of a person who is living a life bent on following their own plans instead of seeking out, finding, and following God's plans. Like Jesus said in MATTHEW 12:34, "For whatever is in your heart determines what you say."

You know people who find some favorite vulgar phrase and weave it into every sentence, or at least every conversation. Gang, our words are a reflection of our thoughts. Like Eugene Peterson puts MATTHEW 12:34 in *The Message* ...

**MATTHEW 12:34 (THE MESSAGE)**

<sup>34</sup> How do you suppose what you say is worth anything when you're so foul-minded? It's your heart, not the dictionary, that gives meaning to your words.

God wants to give you and me a growing sense of **WISDOM AND DISCERNMENT** and about the kinds of people we hang around with, and who we allow to influence our hearts, our minds, our words, and our priorities. And one of the indications we can look to in terms knowing whether other people have their hearts and minds in tune with the mind and heart of God is to look at their behavior and listen to their words.

Again, this isn't rocket science, but we need to be reminded of these basic truths if we're going to stay in step with God's ways and not go into the gutter with the world. I love how the write of *The New Testament* book of HEBREWS writes about this ...

**HEBREWS 5:14 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)**

<sup>14</sup> Solid [*spiritual*] food is for those who are mature, who have trained themselves to recognize the difference between right and wrong and then do what is right. [*emphasis added*]

This verse is saying that the more you and I learn to walk by faith, and the more we take our cues from God about our thoughts, words, deeds, and priorities, the more discerning we'll become about the differences between good and evil. So here's another indicator we can look for in our own lives - if we want to know if we're really

taking on more of the character of Jesus Christ, and if we're really living more fully and more consistently into the will of God, we can ask ourselves this question ...

**“Am I increasing in my *DESIRE* and in my *ABILITY* to let the Holy Spirit help me discern between *GOOD* and *EVIL*, between *GOD’S WAY* and the *WAY OF THIS WORLD*? And is there a growing *COURAGE* in me to choose God’s way, instead of the way of wickedness?”**

The filter for our eyes and the filter for our ears is the Word of God. And the more you and I make the choice to stay in the Word of God, the more we'll live life in the ***WISDOM OF DISCERNING FAITH*** and stay in God's way.

Think back with me for a minute to this morning's drama. This family stated their beliefs about money and helping out “the underdog”, but once the young person showed up at their door with their fundraiser, their ***ATTITUDES OF OPINIONATED ARROGANCE AND IGNORANCE*** came right out. And hey, note to self ... ***OPINIONATED ARROGANCE AND IGNORANCE*** are character traits that almost always go together, because of the way they feed off one another.

Friends, complaining about the words and actions of others, but not seeing the junk in our own lives, is a huge red-flag that we're still taking our cues for how to live life, how to shape our priorities, what to think, what to say, and what to do, from an unrighteous, self-centered world, instead of from God and from God's Word. Listen to what Jesus said about this in ***MATTHEW 7:3-5*** ...

***MATTHEW 7:3-5* (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)**

<sup>3-5</sup> You can see the speck in your friend's eye, but you don't notice the log in your own eye. Amazing! How can you say, “My friend, let me take the speck out of your eye,” when you don't see the log in your own eye? You're nothing but show-offs! First, take the log out of your own eye. Then you can see how to take the speck out of your friend's eye.

Followers of Jesus Christ need to be on guard, we need to bathe our hearts and minds in the Word God, because our enemy is open for business 24-7-365.

***ILLUSTRATION*** ... An older woman named Mabel was well known for never being able to say anything negative about anyone. Finally a friend of hers thought she'd come up with a way to trip her up on this. “Mabel,” she asked, “What do you think of Satan?” Mabel thought about it for a minute, and then replied, “*He's persistent!*”

Seriously, **Satan** is on the job 365 days a year, and if he has one virtue, it's like Mabel pointed out, ***HE'S PERSISTENT***. I mean, **Satan** is a lot of things, but lazy isn't one of them. Day and night he's scheming against us, and that's why God warns us to stay in His Word day and night. Because He knows that we can't afford to let down our guard - even for a minute. ***PROVERBS*** tells us at least three more very important truths about followers of Jesus Christ and our relationship to **the way of the wicked** ...

1. One day the wicked and their plans will fall for good, and God's righteousness and righteous plans will rule forever more. (PROVERBS 24:15-18; PSALM 113:7-8)
2. As followers of Jesus Christ, we're to love the wicked, pray for them, and not judge their wicked ways. (PROVERBS 9:7; MATTHEW 5:44; 7:1; 12:35; SECOND CORINTHIANS 5:19)
3. **WISE DISCERNING** people renew their minds with God's Word, instead of letting the wickedness of the world shape their minds. (PROVERBS 7:1-3; ROMANS 12:1; FIRST THESSALONIANS 5:23)

I want us to close this morning's teaching by reading PROVERBS 4:20-27, and invite you to ask God to use these final words from Solomon this morning to help you "ponder your path" and your commitment to stay on it with God.

**PROVERBS 4:20-27 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)**

- <sup>20</sup> My child, pay attention to My Words; listen closely to what I say.  
<sup>21</sup> Don't ever forget My Words; ponder them - keeping them always in your mind.  
<sup>22</sup> They are the key to life for those who find them; they bring health to the whole body.  
<sup>23</sup> Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life.  
<sup>24</sup> Don't use your mouth to tell lies; don't ever say things that are not true.  
<sup>25</sup> Keep your eyes focused on what is right, and look straight ahead to what is good.  
<sup>26</sup> Be careful what you do, and always do what is right.  
<sup>27</sup> Don't turn off the road of goodness; keep away from evil paths.

You know, one of the most remarkable, obvious, precious characteristics of a follower of Jesus Christ is **HIS OR HER PEACE**. The world, and its plans are restless and always shifting. But when their steps are ordered and guided by God, followers of Jesus Christ cannot be pulled out by the roots (shaken ... PSALM 16:8).

Gang, this week, ponder the path of your feet. Ponder the thoughts in your mind. Ponder the words of your mouth. Make the choice to walk in the **DISCERNMENT AND WISDOM** God offers you. Because as you live according to the instruction of God's Word, you'll be equipped to stop **stumbling around in the darkness of the wicked**, you'll be established, and you'll know great peace.

At the beginning of our time this morning we looked at some of the differences between the plans and the ways of **wicked men**, and the plans and the ways of **God**. Let's review those differences again, and tell God that we're committing ourselves in new ways to His plans, and to His ways.

**THE WAY OF WICKED MEN**

1. Is cynical and chaotic.

**THE WAY OF GOD**

1. Is joyful and focused.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Is self-dependent.</li> <li>3. Views <i>surrender</i> as a <i>weakness</i> that leads to <i>bondage</i>.</li> <li>4. Views people as resources to be consumed.</li> <li>5. Views the <i>here and now</i> as all we have.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Is God-dependent.</li> <li>3. Views <i>surrender</i> as a <i>strength</i> that leads to <i>freedom</i>.</li> <li>4. Views people as valued by God, and therefore as valuable.</li> <li>5. Views the <i>here and now</i> as needing to be informed by the <i>past</i>, while keeping a hopeful eye toward the <i>future</i>.</li> </ul> |
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And now, let's close by re-reading the Scripture we read at the beginning of our worship gathering. Please stand with me, and let's read from PSALM 119.

**PSALM 119:97-106 (PARAPHRASED)**

**ALL** <sup>97-98</sup> Dear God, I love all You've revealed, and are revealing to me; and I am learning to reverently ponder these instructions from You all the day long. Your commands give me an edge on my enemies; lessons from You are never wasted, and never become obsolete.

**MEN** <sup>99-100</sup> I've even become more discerning and wise since I made the choice to consistently ponder and absorb Your counsel, and then by making the choice to do what You tell me to do.

**WOMEN** <sup>101-103</sup> I'm learning to watch my step, and the result is that I'm avoiding many of the ditches and ruts of evil that I used to fall into. The more time I spend in Your Word, the fewer detours I'm taking from the route You've laid out for me. Your directions are so good. Your Words are so choice and tasty. I prefer them to all other options before me.

**LEADER** <sup>104</sup> With Your instructions, my understanding of life and how You want it to work is growing; and I'm learning to discern the differences between good and bad, between "in the dark, unrighteous advice" and "in the light," righteous advice".

**ALL** <sup>105-107</sup> By Your Words I can see where I'm going; because they throw a beam of light on my dark path. I've committed myself to always seeking and following Your ways. I vow to You and to others that I'll never turn back from living by Your righteous order. Down the road, and around the corner, when everything is falling apart in me and around me, I will rely on You oh God, to put me back together once again with Your Word.

**NEXT SUNDAY ... DAVE EDWARDS ... "COMPARING"  
COME PRAYING AND EXPECTING!**