

PROVERBS

Chapter 4

A Father's Wise Instruction

Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight, 2 for I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching. 3 When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother, 4 he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live. 5 Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth. 6 Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. 7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight. 8 Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. 9 She will place on your head a graceful garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown." 10 Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many. 11 I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness. 12 When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble. 13 Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life. 14 Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. 15 Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on. 16 For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong; they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble. 17 For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. 18 But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. 19 The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble. 20 My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. 21 Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. 22 For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. 23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. 24 Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you. 25 Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. 26 Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. 27 Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.

4:1–9 An address to sons. (TLSB)

Solomon in this address (4:1–9) breaks from the four previous and the six following addresses to an individual son, whom he calls "my son" (e.g., 3:21; 4:10). This section is addressed to several "sons" (4:1). Here Solomon reminds the sons of the good instruction he has given them in the past and exhorts them not to abandon what he has taught them. To reinforce the wisdom of his teachings, he reminds them that his instruction to them is the same as his father's instruction was to him. In 4:4–6 he quotes teaching from his father. He declares that "my father" (4:3), David, taught him in the presence of "my mother" (4:3), Bathsheba (see 2 Sam 12:24–25). The mention of a "mother" is intended to recall the first address to a son (Prov 1:8–19), where Solomon called "my son" to listen to the instruction of "your father" (Solomon himself) and "your mother" (1:8). (CC)

Solomon summarizes David's teaching as a series of short commands (4:4–6). David's instruction to Solomon was simple: learn what I am teaching, for it is divine Wisdom! Hold on to it and love it. In three cases a command is expanded with a promise (4:4c, 6a–b). The three promises attached to David's instruction echo those of the previous addresses. First, "so that you may live" (4:4 ,חַיִּים) recalls the promises of "life" (חַיִּים) in the third address (3:2, 18) and the

fourth address (3:22). Second, “and she will watch over you” (4:6, וְהִשְׁמְרָךְ) evokes the use of same verb, שָׁמַר, “watch, keep,” in the second address (2:8, 11, 20) and the fourth address (3:26). The third promise, “and she will guard you” (4:6, וְהִצָּרְךָ), pairs the verb נָצַר, “to guard,” with שָׁמַר, “watch, keep” (4:6a), just as the two verbs were paired in the previous promises of protection in the second address (2:8, 11). These connections between the quoted words of David and Solomon’s previous addresses serve to emphasize to the sons that Solomon’s instructions are not his alone, but were passed down to him from his father, Israel’s most faithful king. (CC)

Israel’s wisest king (1 Ki 5:11 [ET 4:31]) then proceeds to elaborate on his father’s words with his own commentary on his father’s instruction (Prov 4:7). The father reminds his sons that the beginning of Wisdom is to seek Wisdom above all else. He tells his sons to put the highest priority on getting Wisdom by placing it above possessions (4:7), by cherishing it (4:8a), and by embracing it (4:8b). He motivates his sons to value Wisdom in these ways by reminding them of the benefits of Wisdom: exaltation and honor (4:8), which are reinforced by the metaphor of a beautiful headdress (4:9). The metaphor “a garland of grace” (4:9, as in 1:9) recalls his first address, where he noted that Wisdom would grace the head of those who have her (1:9). The “garland” that is made “of”—or that is—“grace” and the “beautiful crown” indicate that Wisdom confers royal majesty upon the believer (see the textual notes on 4:9) so that he will reign with Christ (Rom 5:17; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 22:5). The “garland” and the “crown” anticipate the NT references to God’s gifts of grace in Christ, “the crown of righteousness” (2 Tim 4:8), “the crown of glory” (1 Pet 5:4), and “the crown of life” (James 1:12; Rev 2:10; cf. Rev 3:11; 4:4, 10) to be received by each believer on the Last Day. (CC)

In this address to sons, therefore, Solomon is not only recalling the instruction that his father, David, gave him, but he is also calling on the sons to recall their previous instruction from him in Proverbs. He references all four of his previous addresses in order to connect his teaching with that of his father. Just as David handed down to Solomon divine guidance, both personally (cf. 1 Ki 2:1–12) and through the many psalms that he authored, so now Solomon is handing down to his sons the same Wisdom that will make them wise unto salvation (cf. 2 Tim 3:15). (CC)

Therefore, this address should be read in light of the previous ones, and the father’s commendation of Wisdom should be understood as pointing the sons once again to God and his gifts to believers in Christ. Of course, neither the sons nor we today can keep the commands of David and Solomon perfectly. However, the Son of David, Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God incarnate, did obey his Father perfectly and fulfilled all the Scriptures. All who believe in him receive the saving gifts of righteousness, wisdom, and knowledge through his grace. (CC)

4:1 MY SONS – We are now in the fourth (4:1-9) of ten discourses. It is different in that it addresses “my sons,” plural, instead of simply “my son.” This depicted wisdom as a bride to be sought and won. What Solomon is passing down to next generation, then, is godly wisdom from his own father (verse 4). Through the centuries it has always been this way among God’s people. More than 400 years before Solomon, Moses declared to the Israelite, “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress (This is to be a kind of teaching that penetrates the heart. To send these teachings into them like a sharp weapon. These teachings should be a part of us like a vaccination would go through the whole body to protect from disease.) them on your children. Talk (Powerful speech that declares in a subduing manner. It teaches as it tells. This talk was to be a part of all kinds of conversations, even with casual associates.)

Solomon now addresses several sons instead of an individual child. Though instruction may be delivered to a group, wisdom must be acquired individually. (TLSB)

בָּנָיִם—Similar calls for plural “sons” (בָּנָיִם, with no pronominal suffix) to “listen” (שָׁמְעוּ) are in 5:7; 7:24 (where the parallel verb is וְהִקְשִׁיבוּ, as here); and 8:32. A few translations add the pronoun “my”: “my sons” (NIV) or “my children” (NKJV). However, in the Hebrew Solomon does not identify the “sons” that he addresses as his own. Neither does he call himself their father, only “a father” (אָב). However, in the next verse Solomon states, “I have given you good instruction” (4:2), referring to previous instruction, probably Proverbs 1–3. Therefore, it is most likely that the sons referred to here are Solomon’s own sons and that the instruction he is giving them is a father’s, that is, the type of instruction any godly father ought to give to his sons. (CC)

instruction – moo-sawr’ – properly chastisement; figuratively reproof, warning or instruction; also restraint:—bond, chastening ([-eth]), chastisement, check, correction, discipline, doctrine, instruction, rebuke. Also the same word of disciple used early in Proverbs.

וְהִקְשִׁיבוּ לְדַעַת בִּינָה—The sons are exhorted to “pay attention” (וְהִקְשִׁיבוּ; see the textual note on 1:24) in order “to learn understanding.” Here דַּעַת is not the noun but the infinitive construct of דָּעַת with לְ (pointed לֹ since the following syllable has the tone) to express purpose. The verb דָּעַת is used widely in the OT and has a large semantic range. One cannot simply always translate it as “know.” In this case it means “to learn” (HALOT, 2). For its direct object noun, see “בִּינָה, ‘Understanding,’ and Related Words” in “Wisdom in Proverbs” in the introduction. Since the action expressed by the verb דַּעַת, “to learn,” is a synonym of the abstract noun בִּינָה, “Understanding,” the construction לְדַעַת בִּינָה can be called an accusative of the internal object (Joüon, § 125 q). (CC)

insight – Wisdom – binah – The emphasis in this word is on understanding and the ability to distinguish. – This word is related to the concept of “between” and refers to the ability to make distinctions. Young King Solomon prayed for this type of wisdom early in his reign. (1 Kings 3:9) – Life constantly calls on us to distinguish between what is good and bad, or between what is a wise choice and what is an even better choice. How we make such choices does much to determine in the course of our life. When we face important decisions in life, how do we distinguish between the options? Do we merely act on impulse? Do we follow the advice of friends? Do we read books to gain insight? All these are important factors in life’s choices. But it is even more important that we consult God’s Word (including the scriptural advice of wise Christian friends, counselors and pastors) and that we ask God’s guidance in prayer. (PBC)

4:2 MY TEACHING – The word for “teaching” in this verse is also the word for the first five books of the Bible – the writings of Moses, the Pentateuch – namely, the Hebrew word Torah. The “teaching” we are concerned with handing down is nothing less than the Bible itself. (PBC)

precepts. Hbr lekach. Translated “learning” in 1:5. Root means to “take” or “receive.” These are not new or untried concepts, but rather a collection of truths passed from generation to generation among God’s people. (TLSB)

4:3 when – הֲנִיִּיתִי לְאָבִי—Here the conjunction כִּי has the temporal meaning “when” (BDB, 2 a). It refers to the past time described in 4:3–6. (CC)

tender. Cf. David’s words about Solomon, who was “young and inexperienced” (1Ch 22:5; 29:1). This is part of an autobiographical statement, such as was sometimes used by the wisdom teachers (see 24:30–34; see also the book of Ecclesiastes). (CSB)

only one. Therefore deeply loved (cf. Ge 37:3; Zec 12:10). (CSB)

my father ... my mother. David and Bathsheba (cf 1:8; 6:20). (TLSB)

4:4–9 Solomon’s direct and simple statement encourages his offspring to acquire, retain, and cherish that which has true and enduring value. No truth is of greater value and consequence than knowing and believing in the Savior. (TLSB)

4:4 *he taught me* – וַיִּלְמַדְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר לִּי—In this context the two imperfects with *waw* consecutive have an iterative force: “he used to teach me [frequently, repeatedly] and say to me.” וַיִּלְמַדְנִי is the Hiphil (H) of לָמַד, “to teach,” which occurs in Proverbs only in 4:4, 11; 6:13, and the substantivized participle occurs in 5:13. It is the verbal root of the noun תּוֹרָה, “teaching, Torah,” in, for example, 4:2. (CC)

heart hold fast. David challenged Solomon to serve God with wholehearted devotion – 1 Chron. 28:9. (CSB)

וְהִלַּחְתָּ לְדְבָרֵי לִבְּךָ—With the Qal (G) jussive of הִלַּחְתָּ this clause is, literally, “may your heart retain/cling to my words.” However, “your heart” refers to young Solomon—the whole person, not just a part of him (*pars pro toto*). Therefore the jussive verb can be translated as an imperative and the subject noun can be rendered adverbially: “cling to my words wholeheartedly.” Compare the second textual note on 22:21, where the noun תְּמַחֵם functions adverbially. (CC)

Keep my commands – adverbially. שְׁמַר מִצְוֹתַי וְחַיֶּה—This clause is repeated verbatim in 7:2a. The Qal (G) of שָׁמַר can mean “to keep, observe, obey” a command or “fulfill” an obligation (see BDB, 3 c, and *HALOT*, 8), as here. It can also mean “to watch over, preserve, protect” (see BDB, 4 a, and *HALOT*, 1), as it does in 4:6 (וְחָשְׁמַרְךָ). Note that Solomon plays on the different meanings of the word in 4:4 and 4:6. In Proverbs the sages frequently use such plays on words, making it difficult to translate a repeated Hebrew word or root by the same English word. (CC)

and live – The imperative of חַיֶּה, “to live,” with *waw*, וְחַיֶּה (cf. GKC, § 75 n), forms a purpose clause: “so that you may live,” as also in 7:2a and 9:6a (see Joüon, § 116 f). The only other instance of חַיֶּה in Proverbs is in the eschatological promise of 15:27. In all these verses “to live” conveys the divine promise of everlasting life, as does the noun חַיִּים, “life,” in, for example, 3:2, 18, 22; 4:10. (CC)

4:5 *get wisdom; get insight* – Literally means to “buy” or “purchase.” In OT times, the bridegroom would purchase the bride from her father. (PBC)

וְאַל־תִּטְּ אֶת־מְאֵרֶי־פִי—The Qal (G) of טָטַח means “stretch out, extend” in 1:24. Here its jussive with the preposition מִן in the construction מִן־תִּטְּ means “deviate/turn away from.” (CC)

wisdom– *hokmah* – The most frequently used word for wisdom and refers to practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the chief concept in Proverbs.

4:6 *guard you*. The Hebrew for these two verbs is used together also in 2:8, 11. (CSB)

אל־תַּעֲזֹבֶהּ וְתִשְׁמְרֶהּ אֶהְיֶה וְתִצְרֶהּ—The feminine singular suffixes (“her ... her”) on the Qal (G) imperfect תַּעֲזֹבֶהּ (of עֲזַב, “to leave, abandon,” and Qal imperative אֶהְיֶה (of אָהַב; see Joüon, § 64 a), “to love,” could refer to either of the feminine singular nouns חָכְמָה, “Wisdom,” or בִּינָה, “Understanding,” since both nouns occur in both 4:5 and in 4:7. אָהַב, “to love,” refers to loving divine “wisdom” (חָכְמָה) in 29:3. In 8:17, 21 אָהַב could refer to loving either “Wisdom” (8:12) or “Understanding” (8:14). (It refers to loving “discipline” and “knowledge” in 12:1.) (CC)

Whether חָכְמָה or בִּינָה, the same noun would be the subject (“she ... she”) of both of the third feminine singular imperatives, תִּצְרֶהּ ... תִּשְׁמְרֶהּ, “will watch over ... will guard.” The Qal (G) forms of שָׁמַר and נָצַר are parallel synonyms, as they are in, for example, 2:8, but in reverse order. (CC)

love her. To love wisdom is to prosper (8:21); to hate wisdom is to “love death” (8:36). (CSB)

The believer’s relationship with wisdom is not cold and merely academic. It is one of love. We love and treasure God’s Word, and through that Word, God himself protects us. (PBC)

4:7 wisdom – *hokmah* – The most frequently used word for wisdom and refers to practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the chief concept in Proverbs.

The beginning. What is truly important. Cf 1:7. (TLSB)

רֵאשִׁית דְּעֵת חָכְמָה—The initial construct phrase recalls רֵאשִׁית דְּעֵת (see the second textual note on 1:7). This clause with the imperative קְנֵה (repeated in the next clause) is, literally, “the beginning of Wisdom—acquire Wisdom.” The abrupt syntactical break signals that Solomon has shifted from quoting his father’s words (with the simple commands in 4:4–6) to imparting his own instruction based on what his father had taught him. In 4:7–9 the imperatives and other second person forms are all singular. Instead of reverting to plural second person forms like those Solomon used to address “sons” in 4:1–2, he uses singular forms to address each son individually. These singular forms in 4:7–9 correspond to the singular forms David used to address Solomon himself, which are quoted in 4:4–6. (CC)

Wisdom is our priority; we are be willing to give anything for it. (PBC)

וּבְכָל־קְנֵיךָ בִּינָה—Note another play on words, which could be rendered as, literally, “and with all you have acquired, acquire Understanding.” The noun קְנֵיךָ, “possession, what one has acquired,” is from the verb קָנָה, “to acquire,” whose imperative קְנֵה follows the noun. (CC)

To have God’s wisdom is to possess the kingdom, namely, God’s gracious ruling in our hearts. For what is the kingdom but knowing “the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15)? (PBC)

4:8 Hippolytus: “There are virtues in our power which exalt the knowledge of God ... practice, study, and the whole chain of other virtues. And the man who observes these, honors wisdom. And the reward is, to be exalted to be with her, and to be embraced by her in the chamber of heaven” (ANF 5:172). (TLSB)

will exalt you – Each of the first two verbs is a duplicated, emphatic form similar to the Piel (D) form of the second two verbs. הִלָּף means “lift up,” and the Pilpel (GKC, §§ 55 f; 67 l; 72 m) imperative הִלָּף־הָאֵלֶּיךָ has the metaphorical meaning “exalt her ... esteem highly, prize” (BDB) or

“cherish her.” וְיִדְרֹמְמָךְ is the Polel (GKC, § 72 m) imperfect of דָּרַם, meaning “and she will exalt you.” (CC)

4:9 *beautiful crown.* Wreaths or crowns were worn at joyous occasions, such as weddings or feasts (see Eze 16:12; 23:42). (CSB)

graceful garland ... beautiful crown. Metaphors for honor, signifying a praiseworthy accomplishment or position. (TLSB)

Wisdom places a garland and crown on one’s head. Such adornment was customary at ancient weddings (see Song of Songs 3:11; Ezekiel 16:12), God himself has in store for believers “the crown of righteousness,” which we will receive on the day Christ returns (2 Timothy 4:8).

מִטְּרָה תִּפְאֶרֶת תִּמְנַנֶּה—The noun מִטְּרָה, “crown,” recurs in 12:4; 14:24; 16:31; 17:6. David spoke of how Yahweh sets the מִטְּרָה, “crown,” upon the king’s head and grants blessings, everlasting life, salvation, and majesty (Ps 21:4–7 [ET 21:3–6]). The same noun also refers to the “crown” worn by King Solomon on his wedding day in Song 3:11. Metaphorically, Yahweh himself is the “crown” for his faithful people (Is 28:5), and he makes his people into “a crown of beauty” by his gifts of righteousness and salvation (Is 62:1–3; cf. the wedding imagery in Is 62:5). (CC)

The construct chain מִטְּרָה תִּפְאֶרֶת, “a crown of beauty” (as also in Is 62:3; Jer 13:18; Ezek 16:12; 23:42; Prov 16:31), has an adjectival genitive: “a beautiful crown.” The second, abstract noun describes a quality of the noun in construct. This type of construct phrase is frequently used in Proverbs. For another example, see מַעֲגָלֵי־יָשָׁר, “upright pathways,” in 4:11. (CC)

The verb מָנַן occurs only thrice in the OT, always in the Piel (D), meaning either “deliver up” (Gen 14:20; Hos 11:8) or, here, “to give as a gift” (*HALOT*, 2) or “to present.” Its direct object is the preceding construct phrase, and its suffix (־ךָ) is the indirect object, “(to) you.” (CC)

4:10–19 The fifth address to a son builds on the previous words directed to sons, making a personal application of wisdom. (TLSB)

This is Solomon’s fifth address in Proverbs 1–9 expressed as a father speaking to his son. It builds on the previous address to plural “sons” (4:1–9). Here the father repeats the promise of life (compare 4:10 with 4:4). He then emphasizes that he has taught his son the way of wisdom (4:11), recalling how he had received the instruction from his father, David, before passing it on (4:3–6). (CC)

Prov 4:10–19 reintroduces the metaphor of life as a path (featured previously in, e.g., 3:6, 17, 23, 31). It depicts the father as leading his young son along the proper path of wisdom. This path enables true freedom in life and leads to the resurrection to eternal life (the “tree of life” in 3:18; see also, e.g., 1:33; 2:21; 3:2, 22; 4:4, 10, 13; and, e.g., Dan 12:2–3) because it is the path of the Gospel. Solomon is, therefore, teaching his son to value the Gospel in which he is declared righteous before God, solely by grace, apart from any human effort (see, e.g., “righteousness” in 1:3; 2:9 and “righteous” in 2:20; 3:33; 4:18). The Gospel sets people free from the bondage of sin and death to live a new and everlasting life by the power of Christ (Jn 8:31–32, 36; Rom 6:17–22; 8:2; Gal 5:13; 1 Pet 2:16). (CC)

A stride that is not restricted and a path that will not cause runners to stumble (Prov 4:12) symbolize this freedom. The father urges his son to hold on to this Gospel liberty that he has

found because it is his very life (Prov 4:13). Similarly, Paul urged the Galatians to stand firm in their freedom in Christ: “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1). The Lutheran Confessions quote that passage to denounce human ordinances and regulations that some churches impose on their people as necessary for salvation:

It is necessary to preserve the teaching of Christian liberty in Christendom, namely, that bondage to the law is not necessary for justification, as St. Paul writes in Gal. 5:1.... For the chief article of the Gospel must be maintained, namely, that we obtain the grace of God through faith in Christ without our merits; we do not merit it by services of God instituted by men” (AC XXVIII 51–52). (CC)

Solomon then reminds his son that another path is available to him—one that he should avoid (Prov 4:14). It is the path that wicked people take. To underscore the danger of this path, he forbids his son from considering such a course in life with a series of terse, sharp imperatives (4:15). To suppress every desire for what can seem to be an attractive way in life, the father describes the pathetic state of those who take the evil path. They cannot sleep, eat, or drink unless they are engaged in some sinful activity (4:16–17). They are enslaved to the sinful life that they have chosen. As Jesus explained:

Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the Son remains forever. Therefore if the Son sets you free, then you shall be free indeed. (Jn 8:34–36) (CC)

Solomon closes out this address by introducing another metaphor, that of light and darkness, and combining it with the metaphor of the path. He compares the path that righteous people walk to light that increases in brightness (Prov 4:18). Solomon depicts for his son the growth in grace and knowledge of God that is given in the Gospel. Note that the righteous themselves are not the light, but the way in which they are to walk is the light. This way is Christ, who is both “the way” or path (Jn 14:6) and the light of the world (Jn 8:12; see also Is 9:1–6 [ET 9:2–7]; 60:1–6; Mt 2:9–10; 1 Thess 5:5). As we walk in Christ, guided by the light of the knowledge of God, the dawn of the new day grows brighter and nearer. When the Last Day finally dawns, all darkness shall be banished and we shall enter the new creation of everlasting day and light (Rev 21:23; 22:5). (CC)

The path of wicked people is depicted as the opposite (Prov 4:19). It is dark, and consequently, they stumble (Jn 12:35; 1 Jn 2:11). The contrast between the safety God gives the righteous on the path of wisdom versus the danger faced by the wicked on their evil path is heightened by the threefold use of the verb “stumble” (כָּשַׁל, Prov 4:12, 16, 19). Solomon promises his son that even if he should run on the righteous path, he “will not stumble” (4:12). Those on the evil path try to trip others; they are always “making someone stumble” (4:16). Yet their wickedness causes their own downfall; they themselves stumble, and because they are in the dark, “they never know over what they stumble” (4:19). They shall be consigned to everlasting gloom and night. (CC)

Jesus used this same contrast between walking with faith in him, the light of the world, versus stumbling in darkness without him, before he raised Lazarus from the dead:

If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him. (Jn 11:9–10) (CC)

So also, Solomon calls on his son—and on each reader of Proverbs—to walk in God’s light so that he can walk through this life, and to everlasting life, with Wisdom as his guide. (CC)

4:10 LISTEN – In this the fifth discourse a child learns to walk (4:10-19), the way of righteousness is sharply distinguished from the way of the wicker. (PBC)

years ... may be many. שְׁנֵי יָמִים לְךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּחְיֶה—This is, literally, “years of life will be many for you.” This promise that believers will have everlasting life is similar to the promises with חַיִּים, “life,” in, for example, 3:2, 18, 22; 4:13, and with חָיָה, “to live,” in 4:4; 7:2; 9:6; 15:27. (CC)

The promise of long life is often connected with wisdom (3:16). This can refer to a longer, fuller life here on earth, and certainly points believers to the life to come. (PBC)

4:11 Recipient is no longer a young child. Much teaching and learning has already taken place. (TLSB)

wisdom – hokmah – The most frequently used word for wisdom and refers to practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the chief concept in Proverbs. (PBC)

paths of uprightness. Right paths. (CSB)

הִדְרִיךְ בְּמַעְגְלֵי יֶשֶׁה—The Hiphil (H) of the verb דָּרַךְ, which occurs only here in Proverbs, is cognate to the noun דֶּרֶךְ, “way,” in the preceding clause. It has the causative meaning “to lead, cause (someone) to walk along a way.” See the second textual note on 4:9 for another phrase with an adjectival genitive similar to בְּמַעְגְלֵי יֶשֶׁה, literally, “in pathways of uprightness.” That construct phrase occurs only here in the OT, but see בְּמַעְגְלֵי צְדָקָה, “in pathways of righteousness,” in Ps 23:3. (CC)

4:12 walk ... run. Whatever the pace of life, even during harried and frantic times, God’s Spirit will guard our progress. (TLSB)

you will not stumble. Because of some obstacle or lack of light (see v. 19; 3:23; 10:9; Ps 18:36; Isa 40:30–31). (CSB)

לֹא תִכָּשֵׁל—The verb כָּשַׁל means “to stumble, trip” over something in both the Qal (the Kethib in 4:16) and the Niphal (4:12, 19; 24:16–17). (CC)

When a child learns to walk, at first it is hesitant and stumbles and falls. Later in life, that same child might become a track star. When we learn to ride a bike, at first it seems to be an impossible balancing act. Later, it becomes second nature. That’s the way it is with many activities in life, including growing in God’s wisdom. As we travel God’s way, we become more confident and stronger, provided we continue to be nourished from God’s Word. To walk wisdom’s path is to tread on smooth paths. (PBC)

4:13 instruction – moo-sawr’ – properly *chastisement*; figuratively *reproof, warning or instruction*; also *restraint*:—bond, chastening, chastisement, check, correction, discipline, doctrine, instruction, rebuke. – This is another key concept in Proverbs. It is that quality of being able to follow through and apply our God-given wisdom. We might call it self-discipline. The ancient Jewish rabbis had a saying, “The wicked are under the control of their impulses, but the righteous have their impulses under their control.” - Self-discipline is especially important for us to keep in mind, since our society encourages just the opposite. In a thousand different ways we

are told, “If it feels good, do it!” Proverbs does not deny emotions their due. Joy and self-satisfaction have their place. But they are fully realized only when kept within the limits of God’s Word. God sets up rules for living, not to make us unhappy, but to bring us real, lasting happiness. (PBC)

Guard her – נִצְרָהּ כִּי־תֵי אַ תִּיֶיף—Since מוֹסֵר in 4:13a is a masculine noun, the feminine suffix on the Qal (G) imperative נִצְרָהּ, “guard it,” and feminine pronoun הִיא, “it,” probably refer back to חֵכְמָה, “wisdom,” in 4:11. For נָצַר, “to guard,” (CC)

She is your life. Possessing faith in the Lord and obtaining the Spirit’s power to obey God’s will through the means of grace are key to a full, complete, and eternal life. Wise teachers impart this truth; wise students receive it. (TLSB)

4:14 *path of the wicked.* See Ps 1:1; 17:4–5. (CSB)

Lifestyle. (TLSB)

way(s). Hbr *derek*, “trodden path,” used for a “pattern of behavior or custom.” “The way of the Lord” is twofold: He punishes sinfulness, but He also shows mercy to the repentant. (TLSB p. 844)

Palestine is a hilly and rocky country. Leaving the beaten path invites turning one’s ankle and stumbling. Spiritually, to leave God’s path is to invite a fall (PBC)

וְאֵל־תִּצְאֵשׁר בְּיָרֵךְ רַעִים—Probably the verb אָשַׁר, whose Qal (9:6) and Piel (4:14) forms mean “to walk, go straight ahead” (and whose Piel has a causative meaning in 23:19), is a homograph of אָשַׁר, “to bless” in 3:18 and 31:28, rather than a different meaning of the same verb (so *HALOT* contra BDB). (CC)

4:15 *turn from it* – פָּרַעְהוּ אֶל־תַּעֲבֹר־כּוּ שְׁטָה מֵעֲלִיו וְעָבֹה—Note the play on two different meanings of עָבַר. First, the negated imperfect תַּעֲבֹר with פָּ means “do not go/pass along a way, travel on it” (see BDB, 5 h, and *HALOT*, 1). Second, the imperative וְעָבֹר means “pass by, pass on” (see *HALOT*, 3 a) and so is a synonym of פָּרַע, “to avoid” (for which, see the first textual note on 1:25). שְׁטָה, “turn aside,” here with מֵעַל־, “away from,” recurs in 7:25. The three masculine singular pronominal suffixes (כּוּ ... בּוּ ... מֵעֲלִיו) all must refer to the “path” (אֶרֶץ) or “way” (דֶּרֶךְ) in 4:14, both of which usually are masculine. (CC)

4:16 *cannot sleep unless they done wrong.* See Ps 36:4; Mic 2:1. Contrast the attitude of David, who would not sleep until he found a permanent place for God’s house (Ps 132:3–5). – The wicked like nothing more than to see the godly fall. They can’t sleep until they’ve dreamed up some evil. (CSB)

Description of the misdirected zeal of the ungodly. (TLSB)

כִּי לֹא יִשְׁנוּ אִם־לֹא יִרְעוּ—The *metheg* with the *hireq* (ֿ) in יִשְׁנוּ shows that it is defectively written for יִשְׁנוּ and is the Qal (G) imperfect of יָשַׁן, “to sleep,” rather than a form of שָׁנָה. See Joüon, § 14 c (1). Confirming this, the cognate feminine noun שָׁנָה with suffix, שָׁנָתָם, “their sleep,” occurs in the next clause. (CC)

Robbed of slumber – וַיִּגְנֹבְלָהֶם שְׁנֵיהֶם—The verb גָּבַל means “to rob” (*HALOT*, 3), and the Niphal (N) feminine perfect has the corresponding passive meaning: “their sleep is stolen.” This is the apodosis of a conditional sentence, whose protasis follows. (CC)

Make someone fall – אִם לֹא יִכְשְׁוּלוּ: קִלְיָם—The Kethib is the pausal plene Qal (G) יִכְשְׁוּלוּ, “unless they stumble.” However, in this context the Qere is preferable: the Hiphil (H) יִכְשְׁיִלוּ, “unless they cause (others) to stumble.” (CC)

4:17 *eat the bread ... drink the wine.* They thrive on wickedness and violence (see 13:2; Job 15:16). (CSB)

Those who go the way of evil are sustained and nourished by a diet of wickedness and violence. (TLSB)

The initial verb לָקְחוּ, “they eat,” is followed by its two object nouns, לֶחֶם גִּבּוֹרִים, “bread of wickedness,” a concrete noun in construct with an abstract genitive. Then two more object nouns, יַיִן מִדְּמֵי עֲוֹנוֹתָם, “and wine of violence,” another concrete noun in construct with an abstract genitive, precede the final verb that governs them, יִשְׁתְּוּ, “they drink.” This chiasm emphasizes that the entire life of the wicked depends on their doing evil. The genitive constructions לֶחֶם גִּבּוֹרִים and יַיִן מִדְּמֵי עֲוֹנוֹתָם are adverbial and denote the evil means by which the food and drink were obtained. (CC)

One commentator calls verses 16 and 17 a “picture of upside-down morality.” God’s people will avoid doing anything that causes a “brother to fall” (Romans 14:21); and their “food” – as was Christ’s – is to do our heavenly Father’s will (John 4:34). (PBC)

4:18–19 *light of dawn ... deep darkness.* The Lord is both the path and the light of the world (Jn 8:12). Those without the Lord know only darkness. Those in darkness try to make others stumble (4:16), but they themselves stumble because they are in the dark and do not even know what caused them to stumble. In contrast, those who walk in the light of the Lord enjoy not only His love and forgiveness but also the support and friendship (fellowship) of other believers (1Jn 1:5–7). (TLSB)

4:18 *path of the righteous is ... shining brighter.* The godly have all the guidance and protection they need (see vv. 11–12) and are able to lead others to righteousness (Da 12:3). (CSB)

Enlightened as the Spirit works through the Word, God’s people grow in grace, coming more fully into the light (Jn 3:20–21). (TLSB)

וְהַדְּאוֹר כְּאוֹר הַיּוֹם—Citing the *waw* that begins this verse, some want to place 4:19 before 4:18, claiming that 4:19 follows more logically after 4:17. However, the *waw* should be understood as adversative, drawing a contrast between the wicked in 4:16–17 and the righteous people in 4:18. (CC)

This nominal clause is, literally, “and the way of righteous people [is] like light of brightness.” The noun הַדְּאוֹר often refers to the “brightness” of theophany (e.g., Is 4:5; 60:3; Ezek 1:4, 27–28), and so it is appropriate for describing God’s gracious gift of his own righteousness, as here and in Is 62:1. In the context of Prov 4:18b, הַדְּאוֹר, “brightness,” represents the dawn; see the Aramaic cognate ܕܘܪ in Dan 6:20 (ET 6:19). It grows in intensity until the night is gone and the full light of the sun establishes the day. (CC)

This is a beautiful picture of our heavenward walk. At daybreak the light is dim. By noon the sun is overhead and beaming brightly. When we enter heaven, we will be in the resplendent presence of Him who is Light itself. What a glorious future lies ahead. (PBC)

הוֹלֵךְ וְאֵרָאֵר—This idiomatic construction juxtaposes the Qal (G) participle of הֹלֵךְ with another verb, here the Qal participle of אָרָא, to “*become light, shine* of sun (esp[ecially] in early morn[ing])” (BDB). The verbal coordination expresses continuing and increasing action: “shining brighter (and brighter). (CC)

4:19 *deep darkness*. A dangerous path that leads to destruction. (CSB)

The way of the wicked is the natural human condition. Those who do evil do not want the light to expose them. Rather, they are content to stumble without light in the darkness of evil. Cf Jn 3:19–20. (TLSB)

אֶפְלֵה—The noun אֶפְלֵה “gloom, deep darkness” recurs in 7:9. With the article and the preposition כִּי, it is antonymous to כְּאֵרֹךְ נֶגֶד “like light of brightness/dawn,” in 4:18a. אֶפְלֵה is used in a simile describing wickedness also in Jer 23:12. It refers to the plague of supernatural darkness in Ex 10:22 and is in the covenant curse of Deut 28:29. (CC)

Since the wicked are walking in darkness, they are bound to stumble. The darkness is so deep that they can’t even see what they’re falling over! They spend this life stumbling about in the dark, only to be hurled into an eternity of more darkness. The contrasting picture of light and darkness occurs throughout Scripture. God uses it to compare righteousness and sin, wisdom and folly, belief and unbelief, heaven and hell. (PBC)

4:20–27 The sixth address to a son refers to serving and honoring God with the parts of our body. Cf Rm 12:1. (TLSB)

In this sixth address in Proverbs 1–9 from a father to a son, Solomon instructs his son to avoid evil by focusing on the body. He mentions ten parts of the body: ears (4:20, אָזְנוֹ); eyes (twice: 4:21, עֵינָיו, and 4:25, עֵינָיו); heart (twice: 4:21, לִבִּי, and 4:23, לִבִּי); the whole body (4:22, כָּל־בְּשָׂרוֹ); mouth (the literal meaning of פִּה in 4:24); lips (4:24, שְׂפָתָיו); eyelids (the literal meaning of עַפְרָיִם in 4:25); foot (twice: רַגְלֶךָ in 4:26 and רַגְלֶיךָ in 4:27); the right side/hand (4:27, יְמִינִי); and the left side/hand (4:27, שְׂמֹאלִי). He also organizes his thoughts into ten mandates:

1. 4:20a: “Pay attention to my words.”
2. 4:20b: “Open your ears to what I say.”
3. 4:21a: “Do not let them escape from your sight.”
4. 4:21b: “Keep them within your heart.”
5. 4:23: “Guard your heart.”
6. 4:24: “Turn yourself away from perverse speech.”
7. 4:25: “Let your eyes look straight ahead.”
8. 4:26: “Make a level pathway for your feet.”
9. 4:27a: “Do not bend.”
10. 4:27b: “Turn your feet away from evil.” (CC)

The weaving of the ten body parts through the ten mandates in this address serves to unite them into one instruction. Especially the early mandates in this section can serve as Gospel invitations to receive and believe God’s Word and so be saved and be preserved in that salvation throughout this life, until the hearing son or believer enters the fullness of everlasting “life” (4:22–23). While these imperatives could easily be seen as only commands, so that this section would be primarily

Law (God's demands for what people must do), it should be understood within the larger context as one of the ten speeches from the father to his son, which have a predominantly Gospel emphasis. They are invitations to walk in the light of the Gospel. For those who are already believers, they also can serve as the third use of the Law, which presupposes the Gospel. (CC)

The address opens with the familiar admonition to heed and accept the father's instruction (4:20–21). However, Solomon makes this admonition unique by his introduction of parts of the body. He tells his son the reason why he should accept his instruction: his words are “life” and “healing” (4:22). This twofold promise emphasizes both the temporal blessings of life and health now and also the eternal promise of God for the resurrection to eternal life hereafter. The assurance that the divine words of wisdom passed down from the father will be “healing for the entire body” (4:22) will be fulfilled by the resurrection of the body on the Last Day (Dan 12:2–3), when our bodies shall be glorified to be like that of the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15). Yet already now the believer has eternal life and may receive healing; Christians are touched physically by God through his Sacraments of Baptism and Communion (see also the commentary on Prov 12:18). (CC)

By concluding each of the opening verses of his address with a reference to a part of the body (4:20b, 21b, and 22b, plus, literally, “eyes” in 4:21a), Solomon emphasizes his use of parts of the body throughout this address. (CC)

Prov 4:23–25 speaks of ways that the son should guard his heart. The unusual phrasing of 4:23 (see the first textual note on 4:23) accents the diligence with which the son should do these things. That the son needs to guard his heart refers to his spiritual, emotional, and intellectual life as well as his ability to critically evaluate situations and use his will. The reason for this mandate is that the source of life comes from it. While the NIV and a number of commentators understand 4:23 as saying that the heart itself is the source of life, the Hebrew text clearly says that “the source of life” comes “from” the heart. (CC)

This is an allusion to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who through the Word of God and Baptism dwells in the heart of each believer and flows forth with life-giving power. The power of the Spirit is what will enable the son to follow his father's advice. He needs to guard his heart so that he does not grieve and abandon the Spirit, the source of life. The NT affirms that the Spirit gives life (e.g., Jn 6:63; 2 Cor 3:6; cf. Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:45), and drawing on this biblical language, the Nicene Creed confesses that the Holy Spirit “is the Lord and giver of life.” (CC)

The way to guard one's heart is explained in Prov 4:24–25. First, 4:24 invites the son to turn away from sinful speech. While many versions (e.g., NIV, NRSV) understand this as only instructing the son not to say inappropriate things, the Hebrew text is more ambiguous. It says that the son must avoid a perverse mouth and keep corrupt lips far away. This certainly means that the son himself is not to speak such things, yet it can also mean that the son is not to be where others speak such language, and he is to avoid those who teach false doctrine and espouse perverse ideas (Rom 16:17–18). The ambiguity is probably intended: the son is counseled not to speak lies and falsehoods, which originate from the devil (Jn 8:44; cf. Eph 4:25; 1 Jn 2:4, 22; 4:20), and he is also not to place himself where pernicious speech can be heard so that he does not learn and believe it. Then Prov 4:25 reminds the son to stay focused on his course in life, looking in front of him and not allowing his eyes to wander in other directions. It functions as a transition to the closing of this address (4:26–27), which reintroduces the metaphor of the path. (CC)

The last verses of this address urge the son once again to live according to the father's instruction. When the son puts his father's instruction to work by acting on it, he makes his path level and

easy to travel (4:26). God promises to offer him (and every believer) security. The son is also advised to remain upright, not to lean or bend to the right or the left, since this could lead him off the path (4:27). He is also urged purposely to turn away from evil. (CC)

The caution of the involvement of one's body in sin is highlighted even more forcefully in Jesus' use of hyperbole when he instructs his disciples:

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away from you. For it is better for you that one of your members should perish so that your whole body will not be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away from you. For it is better for you that one of your members should perish so that your whole body will not go away into hell. (Mt 5:29–30; see also 1 Cor 6:9–20) (CC)

Just as Solomon warns his son about misusing the mouth for evil, James writes to his readers about the dangers of the misuse of the tongue:

So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts great things. Look how such a small fire sets ablaze such a great forest! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is a world of unrighteousness set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the whole course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of wild animal and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no person can tame the tongue, a restless evil full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. (James 3:5–10) (CC)

4:20 *my son be attentive to my words* – This the sixth of ten discourses (4:29-27) is structured around the parts of the body – the heart, mouth, lips, eyes, feet, and entire body. Each is used in the service of God. (PBC)

incline your ear. Pay attention. (TLSB)

שָׁמְעוּ אָזְנוֹתַי—The Hiphil (H) imperative שָׁמְעוּ is from the verb שָׁמַעַ, “to turn, incline.” Its Hiphil with the object אָזְנָי, “ear,” is a common idiom in Proverbs (4:20; 5:1, 13; 22:17) as well as in Jeremiah and Psalms. (Pss 17:6; 31:3 (ET 31:2); 45:11 (ET 45:10); 49:5 (ET 49:4); 71:2; 78:1; 86:1; 88:3 (ET 88:2); 102:3 (ET 102:2); 116:2) It is a synonym of the Hiphil verb הִקְשִׁיבָהּ, “pay attention,” in the preceding clause. While the literal English “incline thine ear” (KJV) is archaic, a little of the form of the Hebrew can be retained by the more familiar “open your ears.” Note the play on words with 4:27, the last verse in this section, where שָׁמַעַ, the Qal (G) imperfect of שָׁמַעַ, “to incline” to one side or the other, means “bend.” (CC)

4:21 *do not let them of your sight* - אַל־יִלְיוּ מֵעֵינַיךָ—Literally, “let them not depart from your eyes,” this clause with the Hiphil (H) of יָלַח, “to depart,” is synonymous with the clause with the Qal (G) of יָלַח in 3:21. Instead of the expected form יִלְיוּ the preformative has a short vowel (ִ) and the following consonant takes a *daghesh forte* (ִּ). See GKC, § 72 ee. The implied subject of the plural verb יִלְיוּ is “my words” (דְּבָרַי and/or אַמְרָי) in 4:20. That is also the referent of the plural pronoun הֵם, “they,” in 4:22a. (CC)

heart. In the Bible the hearts represents the entire inner life of human beings. This means that not only the emotions, but also the intellect will spring from the heart. That's why God is constantly looking past outward appearances and directly into the heart. (PBC)

4:22 *they are life* – כִּי־חַיִּים הֵם לְמַצְאֵיהֶם—“They are life” recalls other promises about divine wisdom bestowing “life” (חַיִּים), e.g., 3:2, 18, 22; 4:10, 13), and it anticipates the promise in the next verse (4:23b). This clause refers to people in the plural: לְמַצְאֵיהֶם, “to those (people) who find them [the words of wisdom].” (CC)

healing. Physical, psychological and spiritual. (CSB)

God promises eternal life as well as temporal healing. (TLSB)

וְלִכְל־בְּשָׂרוֹ מְרַפָּא—This is, literally, “and to all his flesh [they/the words are] healing.” The referent of the pronoun (“his”) on בְּשָׂרוֹ must be one individual out of the (plural) people in the previous clause who find the words. מְרַפָּא, “healing,” a noun from the verb רָפָא with the nominal prefix מ, recurs seven more times in Proverbs. (Prov 6:15; 12:18; 13:17; 14:30; 15:4; 16:24; 29:1) (CC)

4:23 *keep your heart* – מִכָּל־מְשָׁמֵר וְצָר לְבָבָךְ—This difficult clause is, literally, “from all guarding guard your heart.” The noun מְשָׁמֵר here must refer to the quality of the act of guarding, so many English versions have “with diligence” or “with vigilance,” which probably are accurate expressions of the meaning. The LXX translates the clause with an instrumental dative: πάση φυλακῆ τήρει σὴν καρδίαν, “with all guarding guard your heart,” and the Vulgate and Syriac translate similarly. Based on this, the editors of *BHS* assume that the ancient translations were from a Hebrew text that had the preposition כּ in כָּכֵל, “with all ...,” instead of the preposition מן (on מְכָל־), even though they favor following the reading of the MT. However, this assumption is not necessarily true. Occasionally מן can be understood as meaning “with, using,” in the same sense as כּ, as with the parallel words וּמְחִיזֵינֹת בְּחֵלְמֹת in Job 7:14. Compare also וּמְשִׁירֵי אֶהְיֶנּוּ in Ps 28:7 to בְּשִׁירֵי ... אֶהְיֶלְקָה in Ps 69:31 (ET 69:30). Another possibility is that מן has a comparative force here: “more than all other guarding, guard your heart.” Either understanding could have led to the LXX’s perfectly defensible translation. (CC)

springs of life. If we store up good things (2:1) in our hearts, our words and actions will be good. “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Mt 12:34; cf. Mk 7:21). (CSB)

As water gushes from an underground spring, so wise action originates in inner convictions and drives. Through God’s Word, the Holy Spirit dwells in the heart of the believer, from which flows life-giving power (Jn 7:38–39). Only by God’s power will the young man be able to follow his father’s advice. (TLSB)

כִּי־לְמַנְנוּ תוֹצְאוֹת תֵּימִים—The noun תוֹצְאוֹת, from יָצָא, “to go out,” always occurs as a plural, usually “extremities, edges of a border.” Only here in the OT is it apparently an abstract plural meaning “source, origin,” hence “source of life.” (CC)

4:24 *Put away...crooked speech.* The two parts of this verse may have slightly different meanings: (1) God desires that His people do not speak sinfully; and (2) that they avoid those who utter sinful speech. (TLSB)

הֲסֵר מִמֶּךָ עִקְשׁוֹת פִּי—This is, literally, “cause to turn away from yourself crookedness of mouth.” The Hiphil (H) imperative of סָר, “turn aside,” has a causative meaning and recurs in 4:27b. The only other instance of the Hiphil in Proverbs is the participle in 28:9, but the Qal (G) is common. See, for example, the third textual note on 3:7. (CC)

The construct phrase *פֶּה מְקֻשָּׁוֹת* is an idiom here and in 6:12 that signifies corrupt speech. The abstract feminine noun *מְקֻשָּׁוֹת* occurs in the OT only in this phrase in 4:24 and 6:12, but it is cognate to the adjective *מְקֻשָּׁוֹת*, “crooked,” and verb *מְקֻשָּׁוֹת*, “be crooked, twisted,” for which see the first textual note on 2:15. The son is to avoid a “crooked mouth” of another person by ignoring corrupt speech. He is also to avoid having his own “crooked mouth” by speaking crooked words. (CC)

Sinful speech can have the effect of hardening our heart. Complaining, cynicism, innuendoes, off-color joking can become habitual. (PBC)

crooked speech. See 6:12; 19:28; Eph 4:29; Jas 3:6. (CSB)

וּלְזוּת לְשׁוֹן—The construct phrase “deviation of lips” also signifies corrupt, perverse speech. The feminine noun *לְזוּת*, “crookedness, deviation,” with the abstract ending *-וּת*, occurs only here in the OT. It is cognate to the verb *לָזַח*, “deviate, depart,” in 2:15; 3:21, 32; 4:21; 14:2. (CC)

4:25 *look straight directly forward.* Not at worthless things (Ps 119:37). (CSB)

Focus on God and things of God. It is not enough to have wisdom begun; it must be sustained. God sustains wisdom in His people through the means of grace. (TLSB)

וְיִשְׁרֹוּ עֵינָיו—Literally, “let your eyelids look straight before you,” this refers to the son keeping his gaze straight ahead of him, as does the parallel first clause of the verse. He is not to look to the side, become distracted, and walk off the path. The reduplicated noun *עֵינָיו*, “eyelid,” is from the verb *עָוָה*, “to fly,” and perhaps suggests the fluttering motion of blinking eyes. The noun recurs in 6:4, 25; 30:13. (CC)

The two verbs in this verse, *יִשְׁרֹוּ* (Hiphil [H] of *יָשַׁר*) and *יִשְׁרֹוּ* are each imperfect in form, but they each have the modal meaning of a jussive: “let your ...,” that is, a form of command (see Joüon, § 113 m). The Hiphil of *יָשַׁר*, “be straight,” occurs in the OT only here, in Ps 5:9, and possibly as the Kethib in Is 45:2. *יִשְׁרֹוּ* is an example of an uncontracted Hiphil imperfect (GKC, § 70b); the expected form would be *יִשְׁרֹוּ*. Here the Hiphil apparently has the intransitive meaning “look straight” ahead (BDB). The cognate adjective *יָשָׁר*, “straight, upright,” and cognate nouns are common in Proverbs, and so this verbal clause is part of the book’s language for the Gospel and righteousness, versus the sin and condemnation involved in being crooked or deviating from the way. (CC)

Looking straight ahead stands in contrast to having shifty eyes, behind which lurks a deceitful heart. A godly person will keep focused on what is right and true. (PBC)

4:26 *Ponder.* Weigh, consider, examine. The root word can describe the pointer on a balance scale (16:11). (TLSB)

path...be sure. Remove every moral hindrance (see vv. 11–12; Isa 26:7). (CSB)

The level paths and the straight walk of the last two verses represent the righteous, godly way through life. Like road signs, God’s Word shows the way. (PBC)

פָּלַט מִמַּגָּל רִגְלָךְ—The Piel (D) verb *פָּלַט* is denominative, that is, it is formed from the noun *פָּלַט* “scale, balance.” The verb is used here and in 5:6, 21 as well as in Is 26:7 and Ps 78:50 to mean “make (something) level” or “weigh (something)” (see BDB) with the extended meaning of

“examine” (*HALOT*). The object of the Piel imperative is the construct phrase מַעְגַּל רַגְלֶךָ, literally, “the pathway of your foot.” (CC)

Are firm – יָכֹנֶה—This clause with יָכֹנֶה, the Niphal (N) imperfect of כָּוַן, “be established, secure,” probably serves as a promise attached to the preceding imperative clause: “make level ... and then [God promises that] all your ways will be secure.” Many English versions understand the clause in that way, although KJV and NKJV take the verb as a modal imperfect, resulting in another command: “and let all your ways be established” (NKJV; cf. NIV). (CC)

4:27 *Do not swerve to the right or the left.* A warning found also in Dt 5:32–33; 28:14; Jos 1:7. (CSB)

The youth is advised to remain upright, to remain focused on God and the things of God, and with intentionality and certitude to turn away from evil. (TLSB)

לֹא-תִטְּבֵן יְמִין וְשִׁמְאֹל—The identical negated verb טָבַע was in 4:5. It is the Qal (G) jussive of הִטָּב, “turn aside, bend.” Here the two nouns יְמִין וְשִׁמְאֹל are adverbial accusatives indicating direction: “do not bend (*to the*) right or (*to the*) left.” The only other proverb with both nouns is 3:16. (CC)

The LXX accurately translates this clause and the second clause of the verse in the MT. Then at the end of the verse the LXX adds this:

ὁδοὺς γὰρ τὰς ἐκ δεξιῶν οἶδεν ὁ θεός
διεστραμμένοι δέ εἰσιν αἱ ἐξ ἀριστερῶν
αὐτὸς δὲ ὀρθὰς ποιήσει τὰς τροχιάς σου
τὰς δὲ πορείας σου ἐν εἰρήνῃ προάξει

For God knows the ways on the right,
but those on the left are perverted.
He himself will make your paths straight
and guide your travels in peace. (CC)

This addition changes the significance of the right and left directions in the first clause of this verse. That clause proscribes any deviation either to the right or to the left. The LXX addition makes the way on the right a positive direction, and only the left is negative. (CC)

The Western church fathers, who used the LXX version of Proverbs, generally emphasize that the Christian must go straight ahead and not turn in either direction.¹ Augustine notes that “the paths on the right hand are praised,” but he still understands this passage as discouraging turning off the path in either direction (in harmony with 4:27a but contrary to the LXX’s addition that commends turning to the right). (CC)

In the Torah Yahweh commands his people to follow his Word and not deviate from it either to the right or the left (Deut 5:32; 17:11, 20; 28:14), and later passages echo that language (Josh 1:7; 23:6; 2 Ki 22:2 || 2 Chr 34:2). Yet there are some passages that support the divine favor shown to those on the right in the addition to LXX Prov 4:27. Jacob confers greater blessing with his right hand than with his left on the grandsons in Gen 48:13–14. In Eccl 10:2 Solomon associates going to the right with wisdom and going to the left with foolishness. In the final judgment, Jesus declares that believers will be gathered to his right before they are welcomed into the eternal kingdom and that unbelievers will be on his left before they are condemned (Mt 25:33–34, 41; cf.

Is 63:12; Ps 109:31). After his resurrection and ascension, Jesus himself was enthroned at the right hand of the Father, fulfilling Ps 110:1 (see, e.g., Mt 26:64; Acts 2:33; 7:55–56; Rom 8:34; Col 3:1). (CC)

Ch 4 Little or no formal education existed in OT times. Instead, the head of the household taught his family, including small children, in the ways of the Lord. Through this instruction, Israelites came to understand their identity as God’s chosen people, to know God’s saving love and promises, and to anticipate the coming of the Savior (e.g., Ex 12:24–27; Dt 4:6–7). Godly parents warn their children of the temporal and eternal consequences of wickedness. The heavenly Father assures us of the grace and blessings God offers to those who love and trust in their Savior and who, relying on His Spirit’s power, seek to walk in His light. • Lord, forgive our sins and help us each day to walk in the bright light of the new life You have given us in Baptism. Help us correctly and appropriately to teach others of Your will and love. Amen. (TLSB)