

2 – “The path of hokma” // *Still STANDING*

Proverbs 4:10–26; 2:1–11

Special announcement: Each year, the Summit family gives \$1000's to International Church Planting through our Christmas Mission offering. Our gifts join others to fund our missionaries through the International Mission Board. This year, due to the recession, with a goal of \$170million, gifts fell short by about \$30 million. That's a lot... They're having to scale back... some of our church planters will not be able to stay their second year. We have a lot of people in our CPC pipeline... wanting to go. So, what's happening is across the nation, we're asking sponsoring churches in the IMB to do a “Christmas in August” offering... make up for the shortfall.

I really want us to do our part. Listen, I know that the recession affects us all, but the last thing that should be affected is the global progress of the Gospel. **Analogy: brain gets the nutrients first. The body knows it is the most important. That's the last place that should be affected! I think the global progress of the Gospel should be the last thing in our lives to suffer.** On August 2, give generously to our Christmas in August offering for global missions. Be in 2 weeks on August 2. Make sure, if you give, you write missions in the gift line.

Remind you to be praying for...

- Team in India right now
- Kids team leaves for South Africa July 24;

Intro:

Anybody remember the ‘Choose your own adventure’ novels...? Where you could make choices throughout the book that would lead you different places? “You’re being chased by rabid wolverines and you come to a hidden cave... do you want to go in? If so, turn to page 210. If not, turn to page 130.” I’d be like, “Go in the cave.” p. 230, “Sorry, it wasn’t a hidden cave, it was the side of a volcano... you plunge 500 feet down into melting lava...” Wah, wah... “If only I knew...”

For many of us, finding the will of God seems like that... 2 doors. Going through one is peace and prosperity; going through the other is doom and destruction. “If I only knew.” Should I take this job? Go to grad school? Should I ask her out? Should I get a divorce?” Can’t flip ahead and see... and cheat like I used to (I don’t want to do that). So, many of us live with this nagging question: How do I know what God wants?

Proverbs 4:10–26

^{4:11} 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.

Do you hear the promises in that?

- ¹² When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble.
- ¹⁸ Your path will be like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. (Wouldn't you love to feel like that about your life? Brightness, and clarity).
- ²⁶ ...all your ways will be sure.

3 observations about the knowing the will of God and walking securely and in clarity from this passage:

(1) The will of God is a path, not a door (vv. 11, 14, 18–19, 26)

- See, it's called "a path" or "a way" 6 times in these verses. The idea of the will of God being a door or a decision... (like in the *Choose your own Adventure Novels*) that's the wrong metaphor. In the Bible the will of God is more of a path that we walk than a specific decision we make. It's a process of learning to live wisely and make wise decisions.
- Most of seek the will of God like it is the answer to a question. 8-ball. We come up on a decision and think, "Which one is God's will? Is it A, B, C?" That's not how the Bible teaches you think about God's will... God's will is more like a path you walk: lifestyle choices; patterns of behavior; ways of thinking; things you begin to love—and then, when you're doing that, when you're "walking that path," you will be doing the will of God!
- In other words, we're like, "Will of God: A, B, or C?" And wisdom says, "It's not really so much A, B, or C... it is me! Follow me... and if you are growing in me, you'll be doing the will of God!"
- This is going to be a little shocking for you, so brace yourself: **God rarely works 8-ball fashion in the Bible.** Where he tells you, in a revelation sense, which choice is the right one.
 - You're like, "Wait a minute... aren't there places where the Spirit said "go here and there" and told people what to do?"
 - Yes, but here's the thing... those were the exceptions... not the normal way God guided. Take Paul... there are times when Paul was supernaturally directed to do something. But most of the time Paul made decisions like the rest of us.
 - Sometimes in his letters he uses rather tentative phrases like, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28-29). That doesn't sound like a guy who God told in his Cheerios where to go that day.
 - 1 Corinthians 16 Paul lays out his plans for the Corinthians like this: (v. 5, my paraphrase), "Yeah... when I arrive in Corinth, I'll see what everyone thinks about me going on to Jerusalem. I tried to get Apollos to come visit you, but he didn't think it was a good idea to do it now. For now, my plan is to come to you after I go through Macedonia. I'll probably stay awhile, maybe even the winter. I want to take my time, if the Lord permits. I'm also going to spend some time in Ephesus because there seems to be some great things God is doing there."
 - Kevin DeYoung, in a great little book called *Just Do Something*: You're not getting the sense that Paul got angelic visits every other day and waited for his dreams, visions of his heart, and supernatural messages written out in the clouds to tell him what to do.
 - Here are ways I hear this talked about today. People:

- “Follow the open doors.” OK. Lots of doors opened in the Bible that were not from God. The door opened up for him to get a ticket. flee from God. Jonah going up to the ticket window... “Do you have any tickets to Tarshish? Or, anywhere away from Nineveh? You do... oh Jehovah Jireh...”
- “I had a peace.”
 - OK. Eve had a peace about eating the fruit. “Was pleasant to her...”
 - The Bible never, not one time, says that peace in our heart was to be our guide. *Heresy I learned in Sunday school.*
- “The Holy Spirit was prompting me to do that.” OK. God certainly might use an impression in your heart. But we all get hunches and impressions, and they are not always necessarily from God. Some are, some aren’t. Your gut doesn’t equal God. Sometimes your intuition is good... but don’t “absolutize” it and claim your gut is always the Holy Spirit..
 - Church people... really bad about this: Start claiming “God said.” Once God says it, you can’t argue it...
 - When you’re a young pastor you learn this the hard way... Lady comes up to me and says, “God gave me this song for the church. Can I sing it?” What do you say back to that? Who am I to withstand God? Then I hear it and I’m like, “God gave you that song? Maybe you should give it back to Him. It doesn’t sound to me like He’s quite done with it yet.”
- The best thing to do is take your impressions, take the open doors... and factor them in, but run them through the context of wisdom! And speak like Paul... it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us... Wisdom is the path. Walking the path of wisdom puts you in the will of God.

Our faulty approach to the will of God (thinking of it like a door) rises out of 4 wrong things in us:

- **We are timid**
 - We don’t really trust God will take care of us... so we need him to tell us something directly before we’ll do it... because we don’t think he’s really more interested in our lives working out than even we are. Here’s a chance to really mess up their lives!
 - Some of you are like, “But I’m just afraid of doing the wrong thing...” What if I was supposed to go to UNC med school and I went to UVA... But God wanted me to meet my wife at UNC... but because I went to UVA I never met her... and so now all my happiness is slowly being erased out of my life, like that picture in *Back to the Future*...
 - That’s where these promises are so valuable. God says, “The one who walks in wisdom, I won’t let stumble; I’ll make his way sure; it will be like walking in the brightness of day.”
 - Even better... Prov 3:5–6: Don’t depend on your wisdom, depend on God. Sheep prayer. God gave up on my decision making ability a long time ago. I’m depending on his shepherdly leadership, not my understanding, to get me where I need to go.
- **We are idolatrous**
 - Behind a lot of our stress over the will of God is the idolatrous presumption that we really need a perfect life to be happy. So we put all this weight on this decision... because how could we ever be happy if we don’t have a perfect marriage or a lucrative career?
 - A perfect job, perfect marriage... these things are not our security for the future. God is supposed to be.
 - The will of God is an idol to you: Here’s how I know... you spend more energy trying to know the will of God than you actually do trying to know God. You think that everything has to be perfect for life to be happy, and so you stress out of the decision.

- Listen, just because you don't have a lucrative career or a storybook marriage doesn't mean you missed God's will. Some of you might be mad at God for not giving you that... but God's intention is not to make your life perfect, but to teach you to be content in Him!
- **We are lazy**
 - We don't really want to put the effort and discipline into growing in wisdom. We'd rather just shake the 8-ball. A, B, or C?
 - Wisdom says, "Seek me daily! Treasure me. Desire me more than gold or silver or a college education or a graduate degree or the best job. Have you sought wisdom as much as you sought your career? If not, maybe you're a fool!"
- **We are passive**
 - We are waiting on God to tell you to do something that, honestly, He's already commissioned us to do!
 - TUPELO — Walter Houston, described by family members as a devoted Christian, died Monday after waiting 70 years for God to give him clear direction about what to do with his life.
 - "He hung around the house and prayed a lot, but just never got that confirmation," his wife Ruby said. "Sometimes he thought he heard God's voice, but then he wouldn't be sure, and he'd start the process all over again."
 - Houston, she says, never really figured out what his life was about, but felt content to pray continuously about what he might do for the Lord. Whenever he was about to take action, he would pull back "because he didn't want to disappoint God or go against him in any way," Ruby says. "He was very sensitive to always remain in God's will. That was primary to him."
 - Friends say they liked Walter though he seemed not to capitalize on his talents.
 - "Walter had a number of skills he never got around to using," says longtime friend Timothy Burns. "He worked very well with wood and had a storyteller side to him, too. I always told him, 'Take a risk. Try something new if you're not happy,' but he was too afraid of letting the Lord down."
 - To his credit, they say, Houston, who worked mostly as a handyman, was able to pay off the mortgage on the couple's modest home.¹
 - Let me give you some examples:
 - Find a ministry...if you don't know... just start serving somewhere
 - We know it is God's will that we reach the world. I've pointed out to you before: A lot of the great achievements in the Bible did not begin with God telling someone to do something. Thinking about Esther this week (4:13–16)... Esther finds out that the king is planning to kill all the Jews, and she knows she can do something about it. We don't read of Esther seeking any divine word from the Lord. She thinks, "I can do something about it... and I should." She didn't even know for sure God would bless it... "If I perish, I perish!"
 - **Kid on the railroad tracks.**
 - Other things... get a job... not perfect job. Take what is there!
 - For most you, get married... Guys sitting around going, "Is she the one? How do I know?" Are you attracted to her? Would she make a good wife, companion and mother? Get your paci out of your mouth and just go forward... ask her out. Say, like Esther, "If I perish, I perish!" (Socrates: by all means marry...)
 - We talk about "finding the will of God..." most of it is not lost! *Just start doing something!*

#2... The will of God is a path. Now, what I need you to see, and that Solomon wants his son to see, is that

¹ Lark News.com

(2) The path you are on determines the destination you arrive at (26–27)

- He tells his son vv 26–27, that he is making decisions right now that are taking him somewhere. He says, “Your decisions are placing you on a path... and that path is leading you somewhere.” So, 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.** Ponder... think, “Where is my path taking me?” Because wherever it leads, that’s where I’m going.
- It doesn’t matter whether or not you want to go where that path is taking you; that path leads somewhere, and if you’re walking it, *that’s where you’re going!*
 - You get that, right? If our family decides we’re going to go to Myrtle Beach for a week... and we pack up our swimsuits, get sunscreen, beach chairs and towels... but then get on I-40 and go West, we are never getting to Myrtle Beach. How about if we say a little prayer about it, ask God for travelling mercies? No... our destination is determined by the direction of the path we take.
 - **Andy Stanley: “Direction, not intention, determines destination.”**
- You see, we get that when it comes to travelling... but for some reason we can’t see it as it pertains to the path our lives are on. You end somewhere in life and you think, “How did I end up here?” **The little decisions you made along the way put you on a path that led you here, that’s how.** “But I didn’t intend to end up here.” It doesn’t matter what your intentions were... **“Direction, not intention, determines destination.”**
 - Let me explain it like this: I get lost a lot. I have no natural sense of direction. We’re driving around and I pull up to a stop sign, and I kind of sit there not knowing which way to go... and Veronica just shakes her head and is like, “We’re in our neighborhood. Seriously.” God did not endow any part of this brain with a sense of direction. (Thankfully, God always pairs people with no sense of direction up with someone who does have one. Is that true in your marriage? How many of you have a sense of direction but are paired up with someone who doesn’t have one? He does it for our survival... and your sanctification.) Here’s the point. I never intend to get lost. (You direction people, realize that about us... We don’t mean to. Don’t judge us!) Our getting lost is not intentional, our intentions to get where we want to go are good... but that doesn’t matter... because direction, not intention, determines destination. I’m a sincere driver. I always intend to get to my destination. But I get on the wrong paths, and they take me somewhere.
- It works the same way in life. Examples:
 - You intend to marry a great Christian husband, have a solid family and kids who grow up in the church. But right now you’re dating a guy who is not a Christian. (It’s the direction, not the intention, that will determine the destination.) (When you get pregnant is not the time to decide if you want to spend the rest of your life with him...)
 - Lady says, “I want to be happily married as an older woman... I want to be that cute older couple that still dotes on each other...” But you’re rude to your husband now; you focus all your attention on your kids and neglect him... where do you think that path is leading?
 - Men: Your intention is for your kids to grow up and feel close to you... to love you, want to be around you... so now, you’re working 70 hours a week and they never see you.
 - Or, you want your kids to respect you, you want them to come to you for advice, so you’re cheating on their mother now.
 - How about this one: Your intention is to be generous with your money... but you have no margin in your life and every month your credit card gets to be a little more... where’s the path taking you?
 - Or, you want to retire comfortably... but you are not saving a dime right now. You know you should... But you’re on a path that is taking you somewhere. When you’re 60 is too late to decide you’re going to have a healthy retirement.
 - **Direction, not intention, determine destination.**

(3) The condition of our heart is the most significant factor in determining the direction of our path (23)

- ²³ Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. The greatest hindrance to doing the will of God is wrong desires in our heart. Our wrong, disordered desires cause us to make unwise choices... and thus to miss the will of God. Our disordered hearts cause us to live in confusion and disarray. ¹⁹ The way of the wicked is like deep darkness...
- Look at how Solomon describes the life of the person with the wicked heart: 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.
- This is the language of obsession. You want something so bad you are obsessed with it. So you make all kinds of bad decisions to get it. You have to have it.
- The essence of the sinful heart in Scripture is the idolatrous heart... a heart that feels like there is something that it needs, and it can't be happy without that thing. Not necessarily a bad thing, maybe a good thing... like marriage or career... but you need this thing so badly that you become obsessed with it: it drives all your decisions, to the point you make stupid decisions in pursuit of it, that end up destroying your life!
 - Marriage: People think: "I need a good marriage to be fulfilled." You obsess over it. It makes you do 1 of 2 things...
 - You're so picky that you'll never date at all. This relationship is so important you can't have someone less than perfect, because this person has to make all your wildest dreams come true... and you start to get to know someone and then you see they're not perfect and you think, 'They have flaws. They can't possibly make my wildest dreams come true.'
 - Other people just date anybody... even if they know this person is not good for them, because they have to have the relationship. I need companionship. Serial daters. They don't care if the person is right for them, they just have to have someone.
 - For both of them... their disordered heart sabotaged them and caused them to make bad decisions... the one in not dating at all, and the other in dating everything that moves.
 - Others do this with their career... I need a top notch career to be happy... so you get a job you don't like, work ridiculous hours... so you end up killing your health and alienating your family... and you're not happy. Or, you never get a job because you're waiting for that perfect one. Your disordered heart sabotaged yourself.
 - Or take the lady who has to have sexual intimacy... and her husband is not doing it for her... so she cheats on her marriage and throws away her integrity and her family.
- *Our disordered heart makes us walk in darkness and miss the will of God!*
- So what do we do? Get your heart back in order! How does that happen...? That's why there is much emphasis on the Word in Proverbs! Getting the word of God into your heart reorders it.
 - How? By helping you get God back in the right place. Only when you love and trust and delight in and depend on God will you ever be able to make wise decisions.
 - Jesus was asked by His disciples... "Lord, show us the way." Jesus said... "I am the way." If you know me, you'll get the way right.
 - St. Augustine said: Love Jesus and do whatever you want! "Do whatever I want? Seriously?" Dangerous. Yes. If you love Jesus, you'll love what Jesus loves.
- The condition of your heart is the single biggest biblical factor in making good decisions.
- Your heart is a cesspool. What comes up out of it is filth! *Illus.* Say you are out camping and you drill a well, and little do you know, it's a big septic tank underneath.
 - You have to change your heart. How does that happen? The stories in the Bible of who God is, how He loves you, His plan for you, that's what changes your heart.

- St. Augustine said real life change... doing the will of God, doesn't begin with an act of the will, or in new and better decision, but in changing the loves of the heart. That happens through learning of Jesus, and you learn of Jesus in this book.
- Your heart determines whether or not you do the will of God. The word of God determines the condition of your heart. So, you won't do the will of God any more than you know the Word of God.
- So, learn it! Take it in, embrace it! Have you received God's love for you? Have you turned from serving yourself and returned to serving Him. Have you received Jesus' offer to save you from your sins, to give you forgiveness, and to set you into a new life of loving and serving Him? Talk to someone... today! Before you leave, say, "I am ready to receive God into my life, to follow His plan!"

Bullpen:

Realizing these three things then (1) *the will of God is a path*, (2) *The condition of your heart is the most significant factor in determining the direction of your path*; and, (3) *you are all on a path right now*)... *What should you do? How can you begin to live in God's will*

Chapter 2 gives you 3 very practical steps... (they are here in chp 4, but stated so concisely in 2) **Proverbs 2:1–11:** ^{2:1} **My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you,**

- Know God's words! ⁴ **if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures...**
- Make it your life's quest... ch. 4: "in whatever you get, get insight..."! If someone came to you tonight and said, "I'll pay off all your bills, including your mortgage; load up your IRA; give you a lifetime allowance for vacations, any car you like; a beach home... or I can make you wise." You should take wisdom.
- I want you in this series to begin the habit of Bible reading...

² **making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding;**

- What this speaks to is heeding good counsel. A lot of times people can see things in your life, and you need to be open to them speaking into you. People tell me some of the dumbest things they have done, and I'm like, "Did you ask anybody about this? Because anyone with an IQ the piece of toast could have seen this coming." I prayed about it. Your friends are given to you to help you see the folly of your ways.
- Be in a small group!
- High school: This is why you need to listen to your parents. You only see the here and now. They are seeing the future! "They know what's best for the future? Look at how they're dressed. That can't be wisdom..." Yes, they may not know how to dress. But in this they have wisdom. Listen to them.

³ **yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding... ⁹ Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path... ¹¹ discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you.**

- Call out for insight. Pray! And then trust God! You can count on the fact that God will guide you.

The stories of the Bible reorder your heart... **This is the "secret" of Christianity**... real change, finding the will of God is not found in new behavior, but in new loves, a new heart. St. Augustine, *The City of God*, said the key to life change is not in changing by an act of the will, but in changing the loves of the heart. How do you do that? Only by knowing His love for you.

We understand the principle of the path with driving... (i.e. this takes you there)... why not in life? You get in the car, all packed to go to the beach... say a prayer, and get on 1-40 West, you're never making it to Myrtle Beach.

- Your friends can see where you're headed, but not you!
-
- v. 18... you make immoral decisions and are out of control!
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- What he is telling his son... *Grow in wisdom!* It determines our whole lives! Chapter 3: More valuable than gold or silver... ch. 4: in whatever you get, get insight... prize her highly! If someone came to you tonight and said, "I'll pay off all your bills, including your mortgage; load up your IRA; give you a

lifetime allowance for vacations, any car you like; a beach home... *or I can make you wise.*" You should take wisdom?

- In addition, your decisions are forming character. Asians in rice patties... tedious work—work hard, keep very organized and accurate accounting. Keeping a rice patty is nearly useless work... we can do it with a machine now. But the virtues of hard work, organization, and accounting skills were not. So, these same people were incredibly good at math. You may be doing something inconsequential now, but you are forming a character habit that is *very consequential*. Reminded me of Rocky 4... habits are set in cutting wood. The way to becoming a great boxer is by cutting wood properly. What character are you forming?
Direction determines destination.

Outliers: (Stanley's path principle... the *character* path you are on will determine your destination). Asians in rice patties... tedious work—work hard, keep very organized and accurate accounting. Keeping a rice patty is nearly useless work... we can do it with a machine now. But the virtues of hard work, organization, and accounting skills were not. So, these same people were incredibly good at math. You may be doing something inconsequential now, but you are forming a character habit that is *very consequential*. Reminded me of Rocky 4... habits are set in cutting wood. The way to becoming a great boxer is by cutting wood properly.

Prov 1:

- Vs. 4: Simple and youth are parallel: Being simple and being young are the same. We are not naturally wise! "Of course." But we esteem our parents so lightly... Spongebob... we are born with folly in our hearts... wisdom is learned from the outside.
- Vs. 5: guidance... we'll get guidance in our lives by being on this path
- Vs. 5: we *increase* in learning... the Bible is a book best understood as it is lived!
- Vs. 6: what does this mean?
- Vs. 7: fools despise wisdom... they put more weight on what they think

Prov 4:10–27

- "I am directionally challenged"
- Vs. 12... this is about walking in the path of the will of God!
 - Did you note the promises of being on this path? Security. Not stumbling, bright path... (i.e. no wrong choices)
- Vs. 14, 18: wisdom and wickedness is called a path. Not a door, but a path.
 - *the will of God as an answer to a question, it is a process as when you learn to walk, step by step*
- Vs. 23... the heart is the key to all of life (Augustine)
- Vs. 25: sinful desires most take you off the path of God.
- Vs. 20: Attention to the word of God is key to staying on the path
 - ... all the references about binding these things around your neck
 - connection to knowing, doing? Some of you think the Bible is boring... if you got into it, you would see that it is not
- All of you are currently on that path (Stanley)
- If you are on the path... you can trust God with the rest! Prov 3:5–6

... check Kitchen commentary; review Keller notes

Poverty is bound up in our hearts... Kirby on children...

- Andy Stanley illustration... getting lost?
- Open with illustration about guy who tried to follow Bible for a year... this is different. The promises: security (v. 33), knowing the will of God (v. 4–5) (Prudence and guidance)
- The two paths: *hokma* and the downward spiral of the fool
- **Knowing must be connected to doing (Peterson book, 69–70)**

- “All right knowledge of God is born of obedience.” John Calvin
- Subscribing to basketball/golf magazine/running. “Every word is to be an extension or deepening or correction of something I was a part of... but if I wasn’t playing, there was nothing to deepen!”
- “If you don’t understand it rightly you will obey it wrongly and your obedience will be disobedience.”
- Keller
 - Prov 4:23... “The key to life change is not acts of the will but loves of the heart.” St Augustine
 - Heart is a spring, not a pond. Get Scripture in your heart, saturate yourself with it!

You are all on a path right now... direction not intention determines destination

- When I get lost, never the final turn I miss... it’s always some other turn along the way. If it were the last turn, I could just backtrack. But the problem is I don’t know when I got lost. You never know when you’re getting lost, you only know after you’re lost! It’s these little decisions you are making now that are getting you lost, not some big final one later you’re going to flow.
- You want a happy, faithful marriage... so you’re sleeping with your boyfriend while in high school. After you get pregnant is not the time to evaluate whether or not you love the guy.