

## **PASS ON THE BATON OF FAITH**

*4 Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention, so as to gain understanding. 2I am giving you sound teaching, so do not forsake my instruction. 3When I was a boy in my father's house, still tender and the only beloved in the sight of my mother, 4he taught me and said, "Let your heart hold on to my words, keep my commandments, and [you will] live. 5Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget the words I speak or turn away from them. 6Do not forsake wisdom, and she will guard you; love her, and she will watch over you. 7Wisdom is the primary thing; [therefore], get wisdom. Indeed, give all that you have acquired in order to acquire understanding. 8Hold her in high esteem, and she will exalt you; if you embrace her, she will honor you. 9She will set a garland of grace upon your head, and present you with a crown of beauty." 10Listen, my son, and accept what I say, then the years of your life will be many. 11I have instructed you in the way of wisdom, I have led you in the paths of uprightness. 12When you walk [in these paths], your steps will not be impeded; indeed, if you run, you will not stumble. 13Take firm hold of instruction, do not let go of her; keep her, for she is your life.*

*14Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil men. 15Avoid it, do not pass by it; turn away from it, and go on [your way]—16because they cannot sleep unless they have done evil; they are robbed of sleep unless they cause someone to fall. 17They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. 18But the path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining brighter and brighter until the full light of day. 19The way of the wicked is like darkness; they cannot see the things over which they stumble.*

*20My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. 21Do not let them out of your sight, keep them in the center of your heart; 22for they are a source of life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body. 23Keep watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life. 24Get rid of a perverse mouth, and put perverse lips far from you. 25Let your eyes look straight ahead, and let your sight be focused directly in front of you. 26Make level paths for your feet and only take the ways that are firm. 27Do not turn to the right or to the left; remove your foot from evil. (Prov. 4:1-27)*

### **Introduction**

Let's suppose that we all go out to the athletic field to watch the local high school track team in action. We take our seats in the bleachers just as the runners are lining up for the relay race. The gun sounds with a sharp "crack" and the first set of runners takes off, speeding around the track with baton in hand. They complete their lap and successfully make the baton exchange. Now the second hometown runner takes off in the lead down the track. That second runner is still in the lead as he rounds the last turn, ... now he's in the home stretch, ... now he hands off the baton to the third man. The third runner for the hometown team opens up a sizeable

lead as he rounds the last turn, ... now he's heading down the home stretch, ... now he's handing off the baton to the last runner!

Oh no! There is a clumsy hand off! The third runner reaches out with the baton, but he doesn't quite make contact with the fourth runner, ... the fourth runner feels for the baton, but it slips through his fingers and bounces to the ground. The whole crowd lifts up a collective groan as the huge lead the hometown team had built up is swallowed up by the other teams and the race is lost, all because of the failure to pass on the baton.

The failure to pass the baton can spell defeat for a relay team. But it is far more tragic when it is the failure to pass on the baton of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. George Gallup, the famous pollster, when interviewed in 1990, commented that he was struck by the failure of much of the "baby boom" generation to pass on to their children the spiritual trust they themselves had received from their parents (*WORLD*, 5/19/90, p.8)

The fourth chapter of Proverbs deals with this subject of passing on the baton of faith: the godly father received the "baton" from his father (verses 3-4,) and now he is seeking to pass it on to his son. As Christian fathers, we must seek to pass on the "baton" of saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to our sons and daughters.

### **I. Christian Father, Pass on the Baton of Faith, by Instructing Your Children in the Way of the LORD**

Verses 1-4 exhort us to pass on to our children the godly teaching we ourselves have received—the godly father of Proverbs is seeking to impart to his son the spiritual teaching and relationship with the LORD that he himself received from his father, and he now urges his son to receive it as his own.

In an age of relativism, when so few know truth from error and right from wrong, it is so important to make known to our children the Word of God. Contrast the comment of Pilate, "*Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'*" (Jn. 18:38a,) with the testimony of the Lord Jesus as He prays to His heavenly Father, "*Your word is truth*" (Jn. 17:17.)

We must return to the Word of God if we have strayed from it:

*When men ask you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, ask them, Should not a people consult their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? <sup>20</sup>Instruct them to ask you to look to the Law and to the Testimony! If they do not make this request, there will be no light of dawn for them. (Isa. 8:19-20)*

We must hold on to the Word of God:

*“What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.”* (2 Timothy 1:13;) note that we are not merely to cherish sound doctrine, but a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must not go beyond the Word of God:

*Anyone who “advances” and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.* (2 Jn. 9)

Note the example set for us by Timothy’s household, in which case it was his believing grandmother and mother who successfully passed on the baton of faith to young Timothy:

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and of what you have become convinced, because you know those from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup>and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* (2 Tim. 3:14-15)

In verses 5-9 we are exhorted to impress upon our children that the most important thing in all of life is to cherish divine wisdom. Bear in mind that what Proverbs is referring to when it speaks of divine wisdom is nothing other than the revelation of the mind and will of God as it is made known in the Scriptures, and as it is exemplified by the Person of God as He makes Himself known in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. The father exhorts his son, *“Do not forsake wisdom, and she will guard you; love her, and she will watch over you”* (vs.6.) Do not get sidetracked, allowing other things to become your number one priority, (such as career, education, money, friends, even family.) Do not cast away divine wisdom as though it were something that belonged to childhood and is to be “out grown,” or as though it were outdated, foolish, and irrelevant. On the contrary, let us be like Peter who said to Jesus, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”* (Jn. 6:68;) ... and let us heed Peter’s counsel: *“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet. 3:18.) Note: Throughout the early chapters of Proverbs divine wisdom is poetically personified as a woman; this is partly due to the fact that the Hebrew word for wisdom occurs in the feminine gender—see the Appendix accompanying Lesson #13.

The father informs his son, *“Wisdom is the primary thing; [therefore,] get wisdom. Indeed, give all that you have acquired in order to acquire understanding”* (vs. 7.) The counsel of the godly father of Proverbs is that we should take all that we have acquired and use it as the payment with which we purchase *“understanding,”* (which is another term for divine wisdom.) The point of this counsel is to impress upon us the supreme value of divine wisdom and understanding. In New Testament terms, the Lord Jesus expresses a similar truth in His parable of the merchant searching for pearls: *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. <sup>46</sup>When he found one of great value, he went away and sold*

*everything he had and bought it*" (Matt. 13:45-46.) We might view Proverbs 4 as a guidance counseling session between a father and his son: "Son, let's talk about your future." "Great, Dad! How am I going to make a lot of money? Where will I have the greatest success and find the best security?" "Invest in divine wisdom, son. Make it your purpose to know God and to seek first His divine wisdom. That is far more valuable than all the money, success and security to be found in the world." Giving counsel similar to that of the godly father of Proverbs, the Lord Jesus exhorts us,

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup>But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal; <sup>21</sup>for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also ... <sup>33</sup>seek first his kingdom and its righteousness.* (Matt. 6:19-21,33)

In verse 23 we are exhorted to instruct our children to take care of their heart. *"Keep watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life."* What is in your heart is sooner or later going to direct your life and reveal itself in your life. Jesus informs us, *"out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. <sup>35</sup>The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him"* (Matt. 12:34b-35.)

In Proverbs 23:26 the father implores his son, *"My son, give me your heart."* This, indeed, is the loving command of the heavenly Father. Why? Because by nature, our hearts are evil and corrupt, note again the words of the Lord Jesus, *"out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. <sup>20</sup>These are what make a man 'unclean'"* (Matt. 15:19-20;) and only the LORD can cleanse and renew our heart:

*I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup>I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>And I will put my Spirit in you and cause you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.* (Ezk. 36:25-27)

No matter how Christian your family and upbringing may be, you still have to bring your own sinful heart to Jesus. Consider the case of Samuel: *"Now Samuel [who had a godly family and who grew up in the very temple of the LORD] did not yet know the LORD ... <sup>8</sup>The LORD called Samuel"* (1 Sam. 3:7-8.)

Christian father, pass on the baton of faith—note only as doctrine, not only as moral precepts, but as a living relationship with the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, by instructing your son/daughter in the way of the LORD.

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and of what you have become convinced, remembering from whom you learned it—<sup>15</sup>how from infancy you*

*have known the holy Scriptures that are able to make you wise with regard to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. (2 Tim. 3:14-15)*

## **II. Christian Father, Pass on the Baton of Faith, by Leading Your Children in the Way of the Lord**

Listen carefully to the godly father's testimony to his son: *"I have instructed you in the way of wisdom, I have led you in the paths of uprightness"* (vs. 11.) Not only does the godly father point out the way of godliness, trust in Christ, obedience to His commands, a life oriented around Christ; ... he also sets the example of all these things. Note Deuteronomy 6:5-7, esp. verse 6;

*Love Jehovah your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup>These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. <sup>7</sup>Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deut. 6:5-7)*

A striking example of a son being negatively influenced by his father's hypocritical behavior is that of Karl Marx. His father stopped practicing his Jewish religion so that he might gain the favor of his Gentile customers and become prosperous. Seeing the conduct of his father, young Marx concluded that religion was insignificant and not worth anything.

Christian father, when your son/daughter looks at your life, do they see that **you** cherish divine wisdom above all else? That **you** practice the counsel the godly father gave in verse 7? What is the number one priority in your life? Are you seeking first the kingdom of God and its righteousness? ... or is your career number one? ... is recreation number one? ... is there something else that is placed above Christ in your heart and life? Where do you place the LORD in your everyday conduct? Do you just honor Him in church, or everyday in all that you do?

Christian father, when your son/daughter looks at your life, do they see that **you** are avoiding *"the path of the wicked,"* as the godly father counsels his son to do in verses 14-17? Are you honest in your business practices? Are you pure in your choice of entertainment (magazines, movies, T.V. programs, etc.)? Are you loving towards your wife (respecting her, ministering to her, cherishing her)? Are you considerate of your neighbor (living at peace with him, protecting his welfare, refusing to take advantage of him for your own personal gain)?

Christian father, when your son/daughter looks at you, can you bear witness to the truth of verse 18 by personal experience? *"The path of the righteous"* is compared to the rising sun as it makes its way to the zenith of noonday brilliance. The point being made is that the further you travel with Christ along

the pathway of righteousness, the brighter and more certain the way becomes—i.e.; by the experience of His presence you become increasingly convinced of His truth and faithfulness. You come to have the same experience and conviction as expressed by Simon Peter, *“Simon Peter answered him, Lord, ... <sup>69</sup>We have believed and know that you are the Holy One of God”* (Jn. 6:68-69.) Note, too, the testimony of the Apostle Paul: *“I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day”* (1 Tim. 1:12.) The Apostle Paul committed his life to Christ; since that initial act of faith he has come to know by experience that Christ is all that He claims to be and is completely worthy of Paul’s absolute confidence. Furthermore, you become increasingly transformed by the truth of Christ. As Paul expresses this truth in 2 Corinthians 3:18, *“we ... beholding ... the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from [one degree of] glory to [a greater degree of] glory.”*

In contrast to verse 18, note verse 19, *“The way of the wicked is like darkness; they cannot see the things over which they stumble.”* By way of illustration: Verse 18 is equivalent to setting out on a journey in the early morning with your map in hand to guide you, and gaining ever greater assurance as the sun rises to noon day brilliance, confirming that you are on the right road. In contrast, verse 19 is equivalent to setting out on a journey in the late afternoon, discarding your map and plotting your own course, then finding yourself completely lost as the sun sets and leaves you in the dark of night.

Christian father, pass on the baton of faith—not only doctrine, not only moral precepts, but a living day by day relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior, by leading your son/daughter in the way of the LORD.

### **III. Christian Father, Pass on the Baton of Faith, and Do So with Confidence**

Up to this point in life the father has been the counselor (pointing the way) and the guide (leading the way) for his son (vs. 11.) But now his son is becoming a young man, he is about to launch out on his own. Therefore, verse 12 shifts to the pronoun *“you”* and away from the pronoun *“I.”*

Now notice the confidence the godly father expresses in verse 12a: *“When you walk in these paths, your steps will not be impeded.”* There is the confidence that the son **will** go in the paths of righteousness. There is the confidence that the LORD will watch over him along that pathway. The LORD will reveal Himself to be the young man’s Champion: *“You belong to God, my little children, and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world”* (1 Jn. 4:4.) The LORD will reveal Himself to be the young man’s Counselor: *And when you turn aside to the right or to the left, with your ears you will hear a voice behind you saying, “This is the way, walk in it”* (Isa. 30:21.) The LORD will reveal Himself to be the young man’s Companion: Jesus said, *“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you”* (Jn. 14:18.) The LORD will reveal Himself to be the young man’s Comforter: *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of*



*death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Psl. 23:4.)*

Notice, too, the desire and the hope that the godly father expresses in verse 12b: *“if you run you, will not stumble.”* There is not only the confidence that his son will *“walk”* in the pathway of righteousness (i.e.; that he will be committed to Christ and lead a godly life;) there is also present the desire and prospect that his son will *“run”* in that pathway of righteousness. There is the hope and expectation that his son would become like the Thessalonians of whom the Apostle Paul wrote, *“We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing”* (2 Thess. 1:3.) There is the hope and expectation that his son would become like those who bring forth not merely thirty or sixty, but one hundred fold fruit for Christ (Matt. 13:23.)

This, indeed, is the Apostle Paul’s desire for his spiritual children in the Lord: *“I pray that your love [for Christ] may abound more and more in knowledge and all insight”* (Phil. 1:9.) In practical terms this running in *“the pathway of righteousness”* means using your spiritual gifts for Christ and His church, ... seizing the opportunities of service to Christ when they are set before you, ... being diligent to fulfill your Christian obligations.

Bear in mind that the confidence and the hope expressed in verse 12 stems from the lifestyle set forth in verse 11.

Christian father, pass on the baton of faith—not only doctrine, not only moral precepts, but a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior, and do so with prayerful confidence.

## **Conclusion**

George Gallup expressed concern over the failure of our recent generations to pass on to our children the spiritual trust received from our forefathers; ... the LORD is concerned about this, too.

Here in the fourth chapter of Proverbs the LORD addresses this concern: His instruction to us through the counsel of the godly father of Proverbs is this: Christian fathers, pass on the baton of faith to your sons and daughters, 1) by instructing them in the way of the LORD; 2) by leading them in the way of the LORD; 3) and do so with prayerful confidence in the LORD.