

Proverbs 23:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge.

Analysis

This verse commands intentional learning. 'Apply thine heart unto instruction' (הַמְסֵר לְבָבֶךָ/havi'ah lamussar libekha, bring your heart to discipline/correction) requires active engagement, not passive exposure. The 'heart' (לב/lev) in Hebrew thinking represents the control center—mind, will, emotions. Applying the heart means wholehearted commitment to learning. The parallel 'thine ears to the words of knowledge' (אֶזְעָת לְאמָרִים-דָּעַת/oznekha le'imrey-da'at) indicates attentive listening to wise instruction. This describes discipleship—deliberate submission to teaching that transforms thinking and behavior. Jesus commanded: 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me' (Matthew 11:29). Paul urged: 'be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind' (Romans 12:2). Learning God's truth requires diligence (2 Timothy 2:15), not spiritual passivity.

Historical Context

Ancient Israel's educational system centered on family and community. Parents taught children God's law (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). Wisdom literature like Proverbs provided curricular content. The opening chapters repeatedly address 'my son,' depicting parental instruction (Proverbs 1:8, 10; 2:1; 3:1). Beyond family, Israel had schools for training prophets (2 Kings 2:3-5) and scribes. Ezra was 'a ready scribe in the law of Moses' who 'prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel' (Ezra 7:6, 10). Synagogues became teaching centers during and after exile. In the early church, teaching held central importance. Churches had resident teachers (Acts 13:1; 1 Corinthians 12:28). Paul

commanded Timothy: 'the things that thou hast heard of me... commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also' (2 Timothy 2:2). Discipleship involved intentional instruction.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How intentional are you about learning God's truth—daily Bible study, reading theology, listening to sound teaching?
2. What specific steps could you take to 'apply your heart' more fully to Scripture and sound doctrine?
3. Who are you teaching, and who is teaching you in the faith?

Interlinear Text

דעת: לאמרי אֶתְנָה בְּרִית יְהָה
to the words of knowledge Apply unto instruction
H1847 H935 H4148 H3820 H241 H561

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 23:19 (Parallel theme): Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way.

Matthew 13:52 (Parallel theme): Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

Ezekiel 33:31 (Word): And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for

with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.

Proverbs 22:17 (Word): Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge.

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