

Proverbs 4:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths.

Analysis

I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths.

This verse presents wisdom as both teaching and guidance, using two distinct Hebrew verbs: *yarah* (taught/instructed) and *darak* (led/guided). The father doesn't merely give information but provides experiential mentorship—both verbal instruction and lived example. The phrase "way of wisdom" (*derek chokmah*) presents wisdom as a path to walk, not just concepts to know.

The parallel "right paths" (*ma'gelei yosher*, literally "tracks of uprightness") uses imagery from desert travel where following established paths meant safety while wandering brought danger. The plural "paths" suggests wisdom has multiple applications across life's varied terrain. The perfect tense verbs ("have taught," "have led") indicate **completed, faithful instruction**—the father has fulfilled his responsibility; now the son must choose whether to follow. This models godly parenting: providing both instruction and example, then releasing children to walk the path themselves. Wisdom is transferable but must be personally appropriated.

Historical Context

Proverbs 4 belongs to the wisdom tradition where fathers transmitted practical and spiritual instruction to sons, typically during adolescence when young men prepared for adult responsibilities. In ancient Israel, formal education centered in the home with fathers teaching sons their trades, religious duties, and ethical

foundations (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). The royal court also maintained wisdom schools for training officials, and Proverbs may reflect that setting where King Solomon (traditional author) instructed princes and administrators. Unlike abstract philosophy, Hebrew wisdom (chokmah) was practical—how to live skillfully, make sound decisions, build successful relationships, and honor God in daily affairs. This verse reflects a broader ancient Near Eastern tradition of instruction literature (Egyptian Sebayt, Mesopotamian wisdom texts), but uniquely grounds wisdom in covenant relationship with YHWH (Proverbs 1:7).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does combining teaching (words) with leading (example) create more effective discipleship than either alone?
2. What 'right paths' has God led you in through the guidance of faithful mentors or parents?
3. Why does wisdom require both instruction and personal choice to walk in what we've been taught?
4. How can parents and spiritual mentors fulfill their teaching responsibility while respecting others' freedom to choose?
5. In what ways is wisdom more like learning to navigate terrain than accumulating information?

Interlinear Text

בְּדֶרֶךְ	חֲכָמָה	הֵרִיתִי יָךְ	הֵרִיתִי יָךְ	בְּמַעְגְלִי	יֵשֶׁר:
thee in the way	of wisdom	I have taught	I have led	paths	thee in right
H1870	H2451	H3384	H1869	H4570	H3476

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 8:9 (Parallel theme): They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge.

Ecclesiastes 12:9 (Parallel theme): And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs.

Psalms 23:3 (Parallel theme): He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Proverbs 8:6 (Parallel theme): Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things.

Proverbs 4:4 (Parallel theme): He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live.

Deuteronomy 4:5 (Parallel theme): Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it.