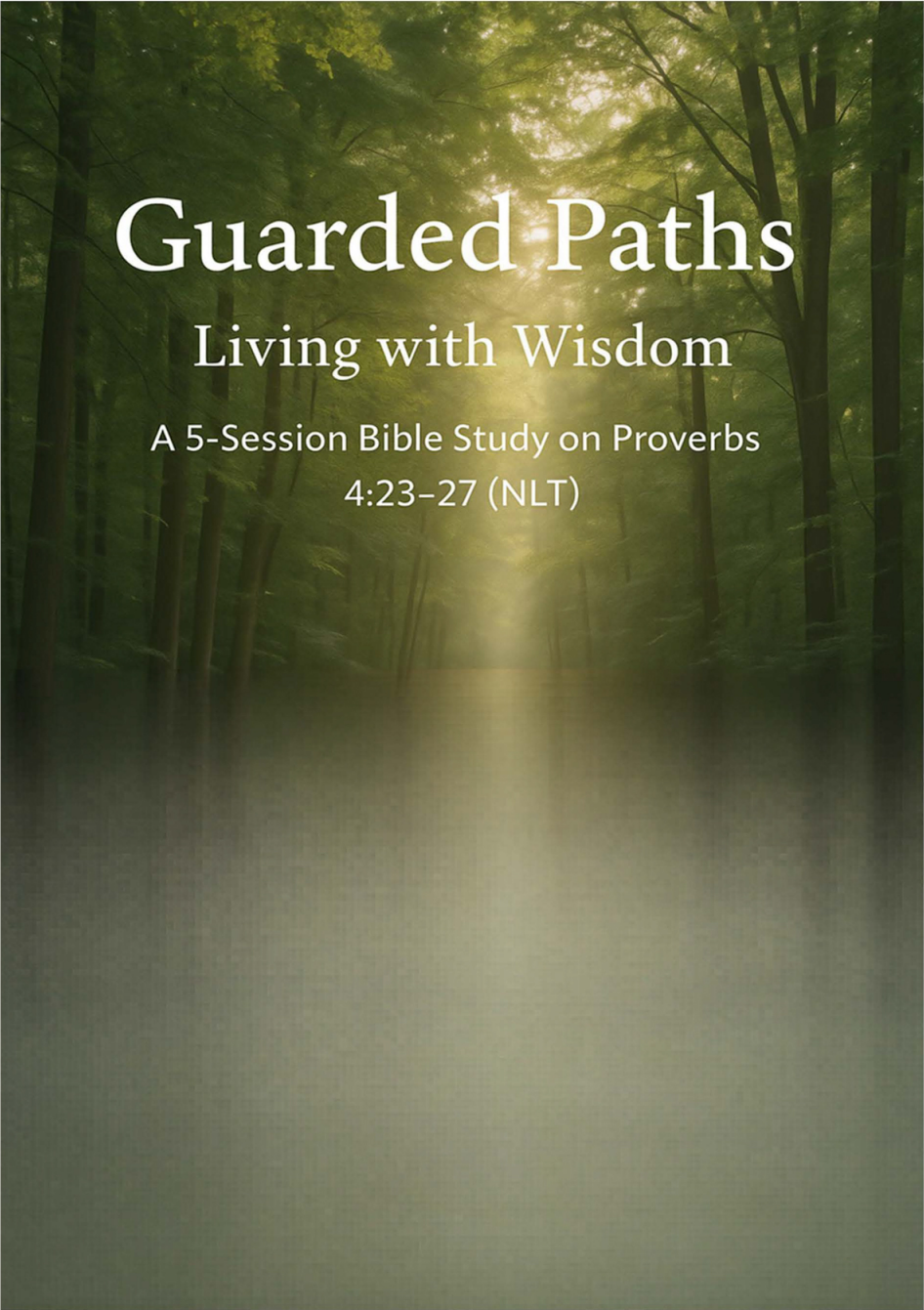




Guarded Paths

Living with Wisdom

A 5-Session Bible Study on Proverbs

4:23–27 (NLT)

Guarded Paths: Living with Wisdom

A 5-Session Bible Study on Proverbs 4:23–27 (NLT)

By Rev. Ejaz Nabie

Session 1 — Guard Your Heart

Session 2 — Avoid Perverse Talk

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Session 5 — Don't Get Sidetracked

Session 1 — Guard Your Heart

 “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.” — Proverbs 4:23 (NLT)

Theme Overview

The heart in Scripture represents the center of our inner life — our thoughts, emotions, desires, and decisions. What we allow into our hearts eventually shapes who we become. Solomon urges us to guard it “*above all else*,” because everything flows from it.

To guard your heart is not to wall it off, but to watch over it — to be spiritually attentive, discerning, and surrendered to God’s Spirit. When our hearts are healthy and aligned with God’s Word, our lives naturally follow His wisdom.

1. The Heart Is the Wellspring of Life

The Hebrew word for “heart” (*leb*) describes the inner person — mind, will, and spirit. Solomon says the heart *determines the course of your life*. Every action, word, and habit springs from what dwells within.

If our hearts are full of fear, bitterness, or pride, those things will overflow. But if our hearts are filled with God’s truth, love, and peace, our lives will reflect His presence.

“A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart.” — Luke 6:45 NLT

Guarding the heart begins by letting God examine it. We invite the Holy Spirit to search and reveal what needs cleansing or healing.

2. Filtering Your Influences

Every day we receive input — conversations, media, music, social feeds, memories, opinions. Each one shapes the landscape of our inner life. A guarded heart filters what enters.

Paul echoes this in Philippians 4:8, calling believers to think about what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. Guarding your heart means choosing what feeds your soul and refusing what poisons it.

Ask: *What am I feeding my heart?* Because what fills us will form us.

3. Surrendering Your Heart to God

Ultimately, we cannot guard our hearts by willpower alone. The same heart that needs guarding also needs transforming.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.” — Psalm 51:10 NLT
Guarding your heart is less about building walls and more about yielding control. When we surrender our hearts daily to Christ, He guards them with His peace (Philippians 4:7).

To guard your heart is to make Christ the gatekeeper.

Discussion Questions

1. What does “guarding your heart” mean to you personally?
 2. What are some influences (media, people, thoughts) that affect your heart’s condition?
 3. How can you invite the Holy Spirit to help you discern what to let in and what to shut out?
 4. In what ways have unguarded moments shaped your words, actions, or relationships?
 5. What spiritual habits help you keep your heart tender toward God?
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Reflection Exercise

Spend a few quiet minutes in prayerful reflection.

Ask the Lord:

- “What’s in my heart that needs cleansing?”
- “What do I need to guard more carefully?”
- “What am I treasuring most deeply?”

Write down what the Spirit reveals. Then, commit one practical step this week to protect your heart — perhaps setting a boundary, fasting from a certain influence, or spending more time in worship.

Session 2 — Avoid Perverse Talk

 *“Avoid all perverse talk; stay away from corrupt speech.” — Proverbs 4:24 (NLT)*

Theme Overview

Words are powerful. They reveal what fills our hearts and shape both the speaker and the listener. Solomon’s wisdom is timeless: *“Avoid all perverse talk.”* Perverse means twisted or distorted — words that stray from truth, purity, or grace. When we allow such talk to take root, it corrupts our hearts and relationships.

A wise believer uses speech to bless, not break; to heal, not harm. This study invites us to let the Holy Spirit govern our words so that our speech becomes a reflection of Christ’s love.

1. The Power of the Tongue

Scripture teaches that life and death are in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21). Words can breathe hope or sow destruction. They can bless or curse.

James compares the tongue to a small spark that can set an entire forest ablaze (James 3:5–6). What we say may seem small in the moment, but its impact often ripples far beyond what we imagine.

When we speak in anger, gossip, or negativity, we reveal a heart that needs renewal. Conversely, when we speak words of love and truth, we mirror the heart of Christ.

“Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.” — Ephesians 4:29 NLT

2. Perverse Talk and the Condition of the Heart

Jesus said, *“What you say flows from what is in your heart.”* (Luke 6:45 NLT).

Perverse talk—sarcasm, slander, manipulation, coarse jokes—often signals that our hearts need healing. Rather than merely trying to “watch our words,” we must invite the Holy Spirit to cleanse the well from which those words spring.

When God transforms the heart, He also transforms the mouth. The fruit of the Spirit—kindness, gentleness, self-control—begins to flavor our speech.

Guarding your tongue begins with guarding your inner life.

3. Choosing Words that Build

Paul challenges believers to “let their conversation be gracious and attractive” (Colossians 4:6). Our speech is a daily testimony of who rules our hearts.

When we deliberately avoid gossip, slander, and crude humor, we’re not being overly cautious — we’re cultivating holiness. Words of encouragement, prayer, and truth-telling become tools of healing in a fractured world.

Ask yourself:

- Do my words reflect Christ’s compassion?
- Would I speak the same way if Jesus were standing beside me?

Every conversation is an opportunity for worship.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Solomon connects “perverse talk” with wisdom and the heart?
 2. What kinds of speech are most tempting for you to justify or overlook?
 3. How have someone’s words (positive or negative) shaped your life?
 4. What practices help you pause before speaking — or repair words that have caused harm?
 5. How can your words bring grace and truth to your home, workplace, or church?
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Reflection Exercise

This week, make a conscious effort to *listen* to your words.

- When do you tend to speak most impulsively or negatively?
 - What does that reveal about your heart in those moments?
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you speak only what strengthens, encourages, and reflects Christ.
- You might also journal or confess any careless words, receiving the Lord’s forgiveness and renewing your commitment to speak life.

Session 3 — Look Straight Ahead

 “Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you.” — Proverbs 4:25 (NLT)

Theme Overview

Focus determines direction. The wisdom of Proverbs urges believers to “look straight ahead” — to live with spiritual focus rather than distraction. The enemy loves to draw our gaze away from God’s purpose, enticing us with comparison, fear, or worldly desires.

This verse invites us to live with clear vision — fixing our eyes on Christ and walking with purpose toward the things that truly matter. When our focus is steady, our steps follow the path of righteousness and peace.

1. The Power of Spiritual Focus

Every believer faces countless distractions: busyness, ambition, entertainment, worry, and the endless noise of life. If we’re not careful, these can pull our hearts in every direction until we lose sight of what God has placed before us.

Solomon’s wisdom reminds us that *what we focus on shapes who we become*.

“Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” — Colossians 3:2 NLT

The call to “look straight ahead” is an invitation to fix our attention on God’s will — not our past, not others’ opinions, not fleeting pleasures. A focused life is a fruitful life.

2. Fixing Your Eyes on Jesus

Hebrews 12:1–2 teaches us to “run with endurance the race God has set before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus.”

When Peter walked on water, he stayed afloat as long as his eyes were fixed on Christ (Matthew 14:29–30). The moment he looked at the waves, he began to sink. The same is true for us: when we fix our gaze on Christ, He steadies our hearts; when we focus on the storm, we falter.

Faith is sustained by focus. Every day we choose where to place our attention — on the Word or on the world, on the Savior or on the storm.

3. Guarding Against Distraction and Comparison

Looking straight ahead means refusing to be pulled off course by distractions — even good ones. Comparison is one of the greatest thieves of joy. When we keep glancing at others' paths, we forget the unique one God has marked for us.

Jesus told Peter, *"If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? As for you, follow me."* (John 21:22 NLT)

In other words, *Don't look sideways; look forward.*

God's plan for your life is personal and purposeful. Stay attentive to His voice, and you'll walk in confidence and peace.

Discussion Questions

1. What kinds of distractions most often pull your focus from God?
 2. How does fixing your eyes on Jesus help you handle uncertainty or temptation?
 3. Why is comparison so spiritually draining? How can we overcome it?
 4. What does a "focused" Christian life look like in practical terms?
 5. How can your focus influence those around you?
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Reflection Exercise

Spend 10 quiet minutes reflecting on what currently holds your attention.

Ask yourself:

- Am I looking backward (regret)?
- Sideways (comparison)?
- Or forward (faith and obedience)?

Write a prayer of recommitment to fix your eyes on Jesus this week. Choose one daily practice — such as Scripture meditation, silence, or journaling — to help you stay spiritually focused.

Session 4 — Mark Out a Straight Path for Your Feet

 “Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path.” — Proverbs 4:26 (NLT)

Theme Overview

The Christian walk is not meant to be aimless. Solomon’s counsel invites us to live intentionally—plotting our course according to God’s wisdom rather than drifting through life by impulse or emotion.

To “mark out a straight path” is to choose alignment with God’s will. A “straight path” is not simply the easiest route but the *right* one—steady, holy, and protected by obedience.

1. The Wisdom of Intentional Direction

Every believer must decide where their feet will walk. Scripture often portrays our lives as a journey or pilgrimage.

“Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.” — Psalm 119:105 NLT

When we seek God’s direction through His Word and prayer, He illuminates each next step. The opposite is spiritual drifting—moving without purpose or direction, easily swayed by circumstances. Marking out a path requires discipline: asking God for vision, setting boundaries, and walking in obedience even when it’s difficult.

2. Staying on the Safe Path

The “safe path” Solomon describes is not free from hardship; it is the path under God’s protection. It’s where His will and presence dwell.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will show you which path to take.” — Proverbs 3:5–6 NLT

When we depart from this path—through compromise or impatience—we expose ourselves to unnecessary pain. Staying on the safe path means choosing righteousness over convenience and surrender over control. It is the humble acceptance that God knows the way better than we do.

3. Practical Steps for Walking Wisely

- **Examine your direction.** What is the true aim of your life right now? Does it honor God?
- **Seek counsel.** Proverbs 15:22 reminds us that plans succeed with many advisers. Invite godly voices into your decisions.
- **Set moral boundaries.** Marking a path involves drawing lines you will not cross.
- **Stay teachable.** Wisdom grows when the heart stays humble and open to correction.

The straight path is forged through daily obedience—one faithful step at a time.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to “mark out” your path rather than simply walking aimlessly?
 2. Why do you think Scripture connects wisdom with obedience so closely?
 3. When have you seen God “make your path straight” after you surrendered control?
 4. What practical boundaries help you stay on the safe path?
 5. How can you help others walk wisely without judgment or pride?
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Reflection Exercise

Spend some time journaling about your current spiritual direction.

- Where has God clearly guided you recently?
- Are there any detours or compromises you sense Him calling you away from?
- What next step of faith is He asking you to take?
Pray for courage to realign your path with His purposes, even if that means slowing down or changing course.

Session 5 — Don't Get Sidetracked

 *"Don't get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil."* — **Proverbs 4:27 (NLT)**

Theme Overview

Life is a journey, and every journey has detours. Solomon closes this passage with a powerful warning: *"Don't get sidetracked."* Staying on the path of wisdom requires focus, discipline, and perseverance.

Distractions, temptations, and discouragements all compete for our attention, but God's desire is that we remain steadfast—keeping our feet from drifting toward compromise or sin. The call here is to finish strong, keeping our hearts and steps aligned with God's will.

1. The Danger of Drifting

No one drifts toward holiness. The natural pull of life is away from God, not toward Him. A sidetracked believer often doesn't realize they've wandered until peace is lost or joy has faded. Hebrews 2:1 reminds us: *"We must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it."*

Drift happens slowly—through complacency, distraction, or fatigue. But God's grace always calls us back. Recognizing spiritual drift is the first step to realignment.

2. The Call to Perseverance

Following Jesus is a lifelong journey that requires endurance.

"So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up." — Galatians 6:9 NLT

The enemy often attacks the weary—tempting us to settle, to cut corners, or to take shortcuts. Perseverance means choosing faithfulness even when the path feels long or lonely.

When you feel tempted to quit, remember: the same God who called you will strengthen you to finish.

3. Keeping Your Feet from Evil

“Keep your feet from following evil” means guarding not only what you believe, but where you walk—your habits, your companions, your choices. Psalm 1 paints the same picture: the blessed person does not walk in the counsel of the wicked but delights in God’s law day and night.

Ask yourself:

- Where are my feet taking me spiritually, morally, relationally?
- Do my choices reflect the path of righteousness or compromise?

God’s Spirit gives us both discernment and power to walk rightly. The Christian life isn’t about perfection—it’s about direction. Every day is an opportunity to take one more faithful step forward.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some common distractions that cause believers to get sidetracked?
 2. How can you tell when your spiritual focus is starting to drift?
 3. What practices help you regain direction when you’ve wandered off course?
 4. Why is perseverance such an important part of wisdom?
 5. How can the church community help each other stay on the right path?
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Reflection Exercise

Reflect on the journey of your own faith.

- Where have you seen God’s hand keeping you steady?
- Are there areas where you’ve become distracted or discouraged?
- What might it look like to “get back on track” this week?

Write a short prayer of renewal, asking God to keep your steps steady and your heart faithful to the end.