



Wisdom and the Heart **Proverbs series**

This morning we will look one last time at the book of Proverbs as we wrap up our summer series through Proverbs. We will be kicking off a series through the gospel of Matthew next week, if you'd like to get a jump start on what we will be giving our attention to as a church for the next number of months.

But just to remind us all of something kind of obvious - not every book of the Bible is the same. Obviously, they are different in content, they are different in their authors, they are different in the time periods they were written in, but they are also different in genre, and there are a number of different genres in the Bible. For example, there is poetry, history, letters, prophecy, and others, but one genre is "wisdom" literature. And those books are Job, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs.

And the chief concern of wisdom literature is to offer its readers instruction for living wisely in this world. So as we've walked through Job previously and then Proverbs this summer, we've tried to glean some guidance from Scripture on what godly wisdom looks like in various circumstances through life.

Just in Proverbs, we've considered what the Bible says about being wise in our approach to work, being wise with our speech, being wise with our money, being wise with justice, being a wise friend, being wise spouses and parents, and other really important, practical aspects of life.

However, if we aren't careful, we might begin to view wisdom as primarily *intellectual* and *behavioral*. In other words, we might be tempted to see wisdom as merely *knowing* what is right and wrong and then *doing* what is right and *not doing* what is wrong.

But even Proverbs has much more to say about wisdom than that. More than just being concerned with our understanding of life, and more than just being concerned with our actions in life, true wisdom, according to Scripture, begins with our hearts.

The word "heart" is used over 90x in the book of Proverbs. So, all of that to say, as we wrap up our series, we don't want you to walk away from this series with the sense that as long as *I know* what is right and wrong, what is wise and foolish, then *I will act* wisely or foolishly.

Have you ever learned something new, or have your mind refreshed about something the Bible teaches on Sunday, said I will change, only to revert back to how you were living by Monday? The reason for that is that we are more than just people who think and act. We also love. Our minds can be informed without our hearts being reformed and transformed.

And so, Proverbs gives incredible guidance in this area. So this morning, I want us to consider what does wisdom have to do with our hearts?

Probably the most important verse on this subject is found in Proverbs 4. I want us to give most of our attention to this verse...

Proverbs 4:23

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

There is a tremendous warning here, that the wise will heed. So, I want us to consider first, what the Bible means when it says the “heart,” second, why is “keeping” it so important, third, how we do that, and lastly, what hope is there for the foolish and sinful of heart?

What is the “heart” of Proverbs 4:23 and the rest of Scripture?

I. Identifying the heart

This is not a biblical call to watch your cholesterol, though that is good, but to keep watch over our inward life.

When the Bible speaks of the heart, it is speaking of what’s really inside us. That certainly includes our emotions, it includes what we desire, what we crave, what we long for, but it is even more. The heart represents our deepest thoughts, deepest convictions, the whole of our inward spiritual and moral life - particularly as it concerns its relationship with the Lord

Because our heart is the very center of who we are, our hearts *represent* who we truly are.

Proverbs 27:19

As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man.

This is why Proverbs describes people by describing their hearts. There are a ton of examples:

Tranquil heart (14:30), glad heart (15:13), cheerful heart (15:15), intelligent heart (18:15), pure heart (22:11), crooked heart (11:20), deceitful heart (12:20), anxious heart (12:25), sorrowful heart (15:13), envious heart (23:17), and many, many more.

Your heart is the very center of who you are, and thus, it is who you really are.

But what Proverbs makes clear, is that the state of our heart has major influence of our lives...thus, the warning and instruction here...

Proverbs 4:23

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

II. Importance of keeping your heart

The ESV is what we've read here, to "keep" your heart. Some other translations use other words that give helpful shades of meaning here. The NIV says, "Guard your heart." The NASB says, "Watch over your heart" - but all translations help us see this call to protect and guard our hearts.

In the Hebrew, the word ordering is a bit different. It would read, "with all vigilance, keep your heart" which gives this emphasis on "with all vigilance." It emphasizes the priority we should make guarding and protecting our hearts.

We guard and protect a lot of important things in life. I imagine we all lock our doors at home...as long as we remember.

ILLUS. - Last year, we took a family vacation and drove to Florida for a week. And after we made the long trek down there, we realized I accidentally left our back door wide open. The way our house is laid out, our back door goes out in our garage, so I guess in the flurry of trying to get all of our luggage out to the van, getting all of our kids and their things out to the van, mixed with the excitement of going on vacation, I was distracted enough to leave the back door open. Thankfully, the *garage* was closed, so someone couldn't walk directly into our house, but, as we were down there enjoying the sunshine and time on vacation together, there was always this small, nagging thought in the back of our minds. I hope the house is ok. I hope no one sees into our garage and sees the back door open.

The protection of our homes is important to us, so we do something about it. We protect many other things in our lives. We lock our cars, we protect our identity, we protect and guard our pin numbers, and many other things in life, because they are

important to us and we know that if we don't protect them, it can cause real problems for us.

But here in Proverbs, we are instructed, above all else, or with all vigilance, guard your heart.

Now, why? Why should we give such vigilance to our hearts? Because, from it flows the springs of life. In other words, our hearts are the headwaters for our life upstream. Our inward spiritual and moral life will determine the course of our lives.

One author describes the heart as the “fulcrum of personhood” or the “engine” that drives us. Your “heart” is the control center of your personhood. It is part homing beacon and part engine. It will *point* us in a specific direction and *propel* us toward it.¹

And we see this in Proverbs right after this instruction in Proverbs 4. Proverbs 5, 6, and 7 is the father's instruction to his son to be on guard against the temptation to commit adultery. And what we see is, in the instructions, the heart is the underlying concern in the warnings against the forbidden woman. Notice some of what it says about the power and danger of the heart...

The father explains that the heart can despise correction.

Proverbs 5:12

and you say, “How I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof!

The heart can be perverted.

Proverbs 6:12-15

12 A worthless person, a wicked man, goes about with crooked speech, **13** winks with his eyes, signals with his feet, points with his finger, **14** with perverted heart devises evil, continually sowing discord; **15** therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly; in a moment he will be broken beyond healing.

The heart can devise wicked plans. In the list of one of the things that the Lord hates, we see...

Proverbs 6:18

a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil,

The heart can cause us to *desire* the forbidden.

¹ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 12.

Proverbs 6:25

Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes

The heart will cause us to *pursue* the forbidden.

Proverbs 7:25

Let not your heart turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths,

What this section of Proverbs demonstrates is that “Seduction, adultery and their underlying folly all start in the heart.”² (Wilson)

Augustine described the guiding power of our hearts in life by saying, “Wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me.” (Augustine)

So, what the Bible is teaching and what Augustine was trying to describe is that your eyes only go where your heart has already gone. Your mouth only goes where your heart has already gone. Your body only goes where your heart has already gone.

Out of your heart flow the springs of life. If I have a fearful heart, I will live a fearful life. If I have a bitter heart, I will be unable to forgive and see relationships thrive. If I harbor lust in my heart, I will be more apt to act on my lustful desires. And so on...

What this means is, my greatest problem and concern, and your greatest concern, is not what is outside of us, but what is inside - our own hearts.

And this is true even if you are a Christian. Even if you are alive spiritually, resurrected from being dead in your sins, because even the regenerate heart can still be led astray.

For example, one of the great dangers for pastors and others in ministry is to think that since we are studying the Bible a lot or studying theology a lot, we are in church a lot, our hearts will never be in danger of being led astray because guarding it is built into the job.

However, we all know that isn't true. This is why we hear so often, unfortunately, of pastors and church leaders who, though they might have incredible people skills, charisma, and intellect, they fail morally. Because mere study doesn't guard my heart. It doesn't guard it from pride, envy, fear of man, and other sins. Ministry won't keep my heart for me.

² Lindsay Wilson, *Proverbs*.

This is why Paul exhorts Timothy, a church leader in Ephesus, in this way...

1 Tim. 4:16

Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Notice, keep a close watch on two things: yourself and the teaching. Make sure your heart is pure and make sure your doctrine is pure.

Of course, that is true not just of pastors and church leaders, but all people are in need of guarding their hearts. It is painful to watch people disregard their hearts only to reap the consequences in their lives.

Wisdom is acknowledging the importance of our hearts and guarding them above all else.

Above all else, with all vigilance, keep your heart. So, it's good for us to reflect and honestly ask, how are we doing with that? Are we guarding our hearts as if our lives depended on it? Because that is what Proverbs teaches. Are we guarding them at all?

It is foolishness to give attention, time, and concern to all other areas of life while you ignore your own heart.

Again, wisdom recognizes the importance of the state of your heart and then gives the attention and care that it deserves.

Now, how do we do that? What does that look like?

1. How to guard your heart

1. Examine your heart - just from the call to keep, we can infer that we can examine it.

Part of guarding my house is going around and making sure the windows are closed and the doors are locked. It is making sure that all the rooms are kept free from danger, and we do the same with our hearts.

We can examine either negatively or positively:

Negatively - When fearful or anxious or angry, reflect what is going on in my heart, ask the Lord to help you see what the state of your heart might be.

Positively - reflect on whether or not your heart is bearing the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22-23. Do I have a loving heart? Joyful heart? Peaceful heart? Patient heart? And so on. And if not, ask the Lord to help you understand why not. What weeds need to be removed through confession and repentance so that his fruit will grow?

2. Be wise enough not to intentionally pollute your heart.

ILLUS. Gender reveal - a couple of years ago a couple in Brazil got into big trouble because of their gender reveal party. They had everyone stand below a 59 foot waterfall while a family member stood above and dyed the entire waterfall blue to announce they were having a boy.

However, the environmental protection agency there in Brazil came down on them because that waterfall feeds into a river that is an important freshwater source for a nearby city.³

They didn't consider, or they didn't care, how the dye upstream would affect life downstream. And when it comes to our hearts, let's not be so foolish not to consider, or care, what we allow into our minds and hearts because it will impact our lives.

So, avoid those things that tempt you, root out those things the Lord reveals to you that need to be confessed and put to death.

3. Embrace the ordinary means of grace - Those evergreen spiritual disciplines of bible reading, prayer, worship, fellowship, confession, repentance, and more.

But in addition - consider, what are the things outside of those that stir your affection for Jesus and holiness. (ex...reading theology, biographies of missionaries, listening to worship music, playing worship music, unplugging for a day or a week)?

Our hearts need regular times of refreshing and renewal. If they don't get that, we face the danger of them being led astray.

Now, as we consider the health or lack of health of our hearts, the most sobering thought for us should be that as much as we might be able to hide our hearts from others, we can't hide them from the Lord.

³ "They dyed a waterfall for a gender reveal. An investigation followed.", *The Washington Post*,
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/09/30/gender-reveal-waterfall-brazil-dyed/>.

God is the One who tests or weighs our hearts, that is, what we are really like, not what we pretend to be. Proverbs highlights this important truth as well.

Proverbs 15:11

Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord; how much more the hearts of the children of man!

Proverbs 17:3

The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the Lord tests hearts.

Proverbs 21:1-2

1 The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will. **2** Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart.

Proverbs 24:12

If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?

Wisdom acknowledges that God knows our hearts even better than we do, that he looks beyond our outward appearance, past our religious speech and performance, and evaluates our hearts.

And he does so all throughout the Bible...

THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE

We see him testing the hearts of Adam & Eve in the garden of Eden, though they are led astray.

In Genesis 6, God looks out and evaluates mankind...

Genesis 6:5

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

The rest of the Old Testament is God looking for a man after his own heart, but people failing over and over again.

For example, God rejects Saul as king of Israel and notice the reason...

1 Sam. 13:14

But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”

Then we read of Solomon, who was influenced by his many wives...

1 Kings 11:4

For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.

We then read in 2 Chron. 16...

2 Chron. 16:9

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him...

And the question is, where is that person? Where is that person whose heart is blameless toward the Lord?

Who of us can stand? Who of us can honestly say that their hearts are blameless, always with a posture toward the Lord, never given to sin, never in need of cleansing?

Only one person could do that. Only Jesus has been the man truly after God's own heart.

Thankfully, Jesus came to redeem our sinful and wandering hearts.

It is through Jesus that God made his New Covenant promise...

Ezekiel 36:26...

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

So...

III. What hope is there for the foolish and sinful of heart?

Your hope, my hope, is only Jesus. Because the only blameless in heart, pure in heart, wise in heart, faultless in heart, laid down his life to rescue our sinful hearts. And he rose from the dead that we might be resurrected as well, to replace our dead and lifeless hearts with beating hearts of flesh.

The only remedy for hearts that wander is the grounding grace of the heart of Jesus.

CONFESSION

We find hope as look to the life of David, David, even though he sinned in tragic ways, was called a man after God's own heart, not because he was pure in heart, but because he turned to the Lord and found in him the only hope of having a pure heart.

After being confronted with his sin, we read the words of David in Psalm 51...

Psalm 51:9-12

9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. **10** Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. **11** Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. **12** Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

So we want to pray, like David, Lord, create in me a new heart...and because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and because of your grace, I rejoice that you've given me a new heart. Now, help me guard it.

PRAYER

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

1 John 3:19-20

19 By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; **20** for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.

VERSES

Proverbs 4:23

Proverbs 27:19

Proverbs 4:23

Proverbs 5:12

Proverbs 6:12-15
Proverbs 6:18
Proverbs 6:25
Proverbs 7:25
Timothy 4:16 1
Proverbs 15:11
Proverbs 17:3
Proverbs 21:1-2
Proverbs 24:12
Genesis 6:5
Samuel 13:14 1
Kings 11:4 1
Chronicles 16:9 2
Ezekiel 36:36
Psalm 51:9-12
John 3:19-20 1

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Proverbs, a book about wisdom, give so much attention to the heart?
2. Have you given much attention to guarding your heart?
3. How have you guarded your heart in the past?
4. Are there unique things in life that you've found stir your affection for Jesus?
5. Spend time praying for one another, that we would have hearts kept by the grace of God and guarded for the glory of God.