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**Teaching: Carlon Tschetter**  
**Series: Proverbs: Living Wisely in a Fallen World**  
**Message: The Battle for Your Mind**

**Transcribed Message**  
**June 9, 2019**  
**Proverbs 4:10-27**

It was October 15, 1844 that a German pastor and his wife welcomed a new baby son into their family. He not only had a father who was a pastor, but this little baby had grandfathers who were pastors. He had other people within his family that were also pastors. As he grew, at about the age of five, it became apparent that he was a very gifted child. So much so that he didn't even like to spend time playing with other children, so they began to make fun of him and they called him tiny minister. It was at about the age of five that his father died. He was then raised by his grandmother and mother. At the age of 15, he went off to the Lutheran boarding school and there he began to study and look forward towards the ministry. At age 16, he was confirmed into the Lutheran church but it was already even at that point that he began to have some doubts about the veracity of the truthfulness of the Bible and of all of Christianity. When he was 17, he went off to the University of Bonn to study theology, but instead of studying theology he found himself studying partying. He gave himself fully over to the party scene with alcohol and sex and all manner of other things that were attractive to a 17-year-old boy away from home. After graduation, he accepted a position at Swiss University. A few years after that he wrote his first book called *The Birth of Tragedy*, which is really a screed against Christianity and everything that Christianity stands for. Ten years later he wrote the book that he is most famous for, *The Parable of the Madman*, and the statement within that book that he's best known for "God is dead. God remains dead and we have killed Him." His name, of course, was Frederick Nietzsche. Writing about his life, Henry Damon made this observation: "If we wish to avoid his fate, if we wish to avoid the precipice toward which we are still invisibly hurtling, we would do well to heed the wise words he whose footsteps you follow in his destination you will reach."

It seems very appropriate to me that in the opening chapters of Proverbs, Solomon is sounding a theme very similar to what Henry Damon said about the life of Frederick Nietzsche. We come this morning to Proverbs chapter 4 again and we pick up at the 10<sup>th</sup> verse. We'll go to the end of this chapter. We want to see this morning the most important thing about you is your heart. Guard it like your life depended on it ... because it does.

Let's do a quick overview. We looked at this opening set of verses in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter last Sunday, verses 1-9. This whole chapter could really be put under the category of character development. If chapter 1 was a warning and chapter 2 was an exhortation, if chapter 3 was really God's view of success if you will, then chapter 4 really becomes a chapter that highlights what it means to see character developed in our life. In verses 1 through 9, we have already seen that we are to give attention to the truth. Give priority to the truth.

I was hugely encouraged this past week when I received an email in my inbox and it said this: I've always struggled with how to teach my kids the Bible when I barely know it myself. I'm trying to learn but have always felt like I wasn't equipped to teach my kids. As I reflect, I realize I was hoping someone else would do it and they would do it better than I could. It really hit home after we looked at those first 9 verses that if we are not teaching the gospel in our home, then we are setting them up to be influenced by others. Not my goal. Tonight we read and discussed our first passage as a family. Although I was fully prepared to do it badly and to accept much less than perfection, I was blessed with a relatively successful experience. This considering that just keeping (the names of her children) them still and listening is its own challenge. I have always struggled with not wanting to do things if I wasn't good or perfect at them, so your reiterating that we do not have to be perfect was what I needed to hear." I thought that's what Solomon is trying to say. Solomon is trying to impress upon us as parents and grandparents and influencers of children that we have this awesome and wonderful responsibility to give attention to the truth, to give priority to the truth. That is the opening 9 verses.

Then in verses 10 through 19, and we're going to handle this a little bit differently than we might normally, but in verses 10 through 19 we're going to do a flyover and

then we'll come back and pick out some of the main things here as we go. I want you to see in verses 10 through 19 there's three different ways that we can look at these verses. There is first of all the way of life in verses 10 through 13. Let's look at those: "Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many. I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness. When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble. Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life." There you have in those verses a path that is marked the way of life. It's marked the way of wisdom. If you look at those verses, he is talking about the fact that people who walk on this path have a long life. That is not a promise, that everybody is going to have a long life. It is a general statement about life that if you walk in righteousness there is God's blessing.

There is the purpose of life in verse 11. Verse 12 there's consistency. Verse 13 there's quality. In fact, when I was reading that and you look at verse 12 – when you walk your step will not be hampered, and if you run you will not stumble – I thought of Isaiah 40:31. Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall walk and not be weary. They shall run and not be faint. It's almost like Isaiah was reflecting back on what Solomon said there in that 12<sup>th</sup> verse. So you have this passage that is clearly marked the way of wisdom. Wise people walk this path and they have a long life, a purposeful life. They have a consistent life. They have a quality of life that comes by walking in God's righteousness.

Then you have on the other side of that the way of death. The path of the fool in verses 14 to 17: "Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on. For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong; for they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble. For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence." You look at those opening couple of verses 14 and 15. He just rattles off six commands in those opening two verses. Six commands that we are either to avoid or not be involved in. It just reminds us again that sin is incredibly good at promising us all kinds of stuff and is terrible at delivering. Sin promises people the good life, the fun life. Sin promises people happiness and the pleasures of life. It puts all of those things before us and asks don't you want this. But it never tells us of the true outcome – the enslavement and the death

that comes when you choose that path. So you have clearly these choices. You have the way of life and the way of death.

Look at what he says about right living in verses 18 and 19. I love these two verses. We'll talk about them a little bit more: "But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; for they do not know over what they stumble." These two verses are so graphic in their description. They're so picturesque in what they are communicating to us about this matter of right living. Another way to refer to the way of wisdom is to walk in light. I like the way he says it just keeps getting brighter and brighter and brighter. This way of walking in the wisdom of God.

Then of course conversely there's the way of death. That's like the way of darkness. It was 8:45, 9 o'clock here when it was supposed to be light, and this huge front just comes through. It enveloped us in darkness. That's what this path of death inevitably does to those who choose to walk that path. Instead of walking on a path where it's getting brighter and brighter, you are walking on a path in which it is increasingly dark and darker still.

So now you look at that set of verses 10 to 19 and there are four things that I want you just to note. First of all, there is a choice. Whenever Solomon does this, he is giving his sons and his daughter a choice that they are going to have to make. You're going to have to choose and the reality is this is a choice that you make not just daily, but this is a choice you're making frequently through the day. It's a daily choice, but it's a choice that is required many times in the course of this day. You're making the choice to walk in light or you're making a choice to walk in darkness, to walk the way of the wise or to walk the way of the fool. So there is a choice to be made.

Second, there's two ways. There's just two choices. There's a way of life. There is the way of light. There's the way of wisdom. Or there's the way of darkness. There is a way of death. There's a way of the fool. Here's what people want. People want for there to be a third way. They want for there to be a muddling in the middle way. They don't want to live passionately, fully totally sold out to Jesus Christ because of the demands of following Christ that he laid it out in Luke 14. To be a true follower, to be a true disciple, you've got to be willing to count the cost every day. You've got to be willing

to make those choices every day. Frankly, most people don't want to do that. Now they're smart enough to know they don't want to walk way of death. They don't want to walk the way of the fool. What they really want is they want to have a foot firmly planted on both sides and fool themselves into thinking they're walking somehow this middle path that doesn't exist. There are just two choices. Your life is either being defined as a wise person because you're walking in the wisdom of God's Word, or you're a fool because you're choosing the way of the world. A lot of people have to realize those are the only two choices that Christ gives to us.

I think the third thing that you note here is this is a journey. This is a journey. This is not a quick fix. It is not something that just happens overnight. You're on a marathon. You're on a long journey.

Then the last thing I would point out is just the great hope of the gospel. Look with me in verse 18. Verse 18 is the gospel: "But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day." You know what verse comes to mind it when I read that? Philippians 1:6 when Paul said He who has begun a good work in you, He has promised that He is going to bring that work to fruition. He is going to bring it to completion until the day of Jesus Christ. That is what verse 18 seems to say to me. It truly is getting brighter and brighter. When you're walking this path of wisdom in the power of God's Spirit, then this light is shining brighter and brighter and the quality and consistency of your life is increasing. All of the things that he's talked about are there for us.

So how are we going to do that? How are we going to stay on track? How are we going to stay focused to be on that path of wisdom? Let's look at protecting the heart with God's truth. That's really the heart of this section in Proverbs. The exhortation comes to us in verse 20 and 21. It also is reflected back in verses 10 and 11 but look at verse 20 and 21: "My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart." So the first thing that we see again. We're going to say it. This is not new information. This is not new material that he is putting forward in this 4<sup>th</sup> chapter beginning in verse 10. This is deliberate repetition yet again on the part of this father. We might want to say as we said in Sundays past: Dad, can't you think of anything new to say to me? I don't know if parents

say this anymore but you know we used to say if I've told you once, I've told you a million times. That's Solomon. He's telling you for the millionth time. This is what you need to do. This is the choice you need to make.

If you remember last week, we mentioned that statement about the Christian life. It was actually Derrick Kidner I found out. He said this: "The Christian life is about this persistent dogged attention to familiar truth." That's all Solomon is underscoring here. Sons, daughters, this is persistent dogged attention just to familiar truth and to walk in it. In fact, when you look at verse 10 it says hear, my son, and accept my words. Very similar to what he says in verse 20 – that the years of your life may be many. That word accept is a Hebrew word that is taken right out of like a wedding ceremony in which a young man is being asked do you accept this woman to be your wife? Or to the bride do you receive, do you accept this man to be your husband? What's the proper response to that? You're supposed to say back I do. You're supposed to say I do. I do accept. The language that the father is using here. My sons and daughters, accept God's truth. It was almost like a catechism and they were supposed to say back, okay dad, we do accept that. In fact, as you see this phrase my son, 23 times that appears in the book of Proverbs. 23 times. 13 of those times it's in the context of accepting and welcoming and receiving God's wisdom and truth. So clearly this dad is not to give up on this message.

Secondly, he's saying in verse 21 get it and don't let go. Get it and don't let go. Verse 21: "Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart." Now I wonder when a Jewish young person heard that statement. Let them not escape from your sight. Keep them within your heart. Within your heart. I wonder if they didn't have a connection to the tabernacle and to the temple. Remember the holy of holies. There was one piece of furniture, the Ark of the Covenant. What was in that ark? The law of God. Within the ark were the 10 Commandments that God had given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Surely as this dad says I want you to put those things within your heart, there would have been in these faithful Jewish instructional times within the family the reminder often that within that tabernacle setting, out there among us at the Temple in Jerusalem, in that place of the holy of holies, where that high priest went only one time each year on the Day of Atonement, within that ark, that most precious place, there was the law of God, there was the Word of God, there was the truth of God. It brings to mind

Psalm 119. Thy word have I hidden within my heart. Thy word have I hidden in my heart. You have some of the same pictures that are given to us here.

What's the motivation for all of this? What's the reason behind this? He says in verse 22: "For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh." Listen. Every area of life is affected by how you respond to the truth of God's Word. Every area of life is affected by what you do with the truth of God's Word, with the wisdom of God's Word. That's why Solomon is so persistent, so dogged if you will, in bringing this truth home to his children. He realizes that every part of life is alternately touched and affected by whether this truth is within us or not. And whether it is not just within us, but whether it is being lived out from us.

So we begin where we might logically start. In our relationship with God. Tell me about your walk with God. Tell me about your relationship with God. What's going on in your relationship with God and in your walk with God apart from the truth and the wisdom of this book. You can say whatever you want about your walk with God, but if it isn't being enriched every day by the truth of this Word, it's shriveling up. Think about any area of your life. Think about your marriage. You can give the most glowing testimony, the most wonderful statements about your time in the Word, but if it's not impacting who you are as a husband, as a father, as a wife, as a mother, then I don't think what's being said here is happening in your experience. They are life to those who find them (verse 22) and healing to all of their flesh. They're impacting you! Your family life: parent to child, child to parents. Just name it. What's going on at work. Your view of your job. Your view of people. Your response to authority. Everything is impacted. Remember that statement by Mark Twain: "It's not the parts of the Bible that I don't understand that bother me. It's the parts of the Bible that I do understand that bother me." That's the impact of verse 22. These words are supposed to impact our life. They're supposed to bring about this change.

You see something of that in the rest of these verses because when you look at the analogy that he draws to the physical body and the impact of this truth on our life. He is underscoring literally in this analogy every area of life. Just look at verse 20. He is talking about your ears. In verse 21 he is talking about your eyes. In verse 23 he is talking about your heart. In verse 24 he is talking about your mouth. In verses 26 and 27

he is talking about your feet. What is he doing? He's just drawing together by way of this visual application of our physical body this analogy and how it's impacting every area of life. I think back to chapter 3 verse 21: "My son, do not lose sight of this. Keep sound wisdom and discretion. They will be life for your soul and an adornment for your neck. Then you will walk on your way securely and your foot will not stumble. If you lie down, you will not be afraid and when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. "My friends, that is a beautiful picture of the freedom of God's Word at work in our life. That's the beautiful picture of what the Word wants to do in our life every day.

So where does this all begin? He tells us in verse 23. Look at verse 23. It all begins when we understand that the focal point of it all is within us. Verse 23: "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." Now, I like the NIV at this point because here's what this version says: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." I think that just nails it. Above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life. We might call this a 3M verse. The 3M company makes tapes and adhesives. This is a good way to relate this verse. Proverbs 4:23 needs to be a 3M verse in your mind. You need to mark it in your Bible. You need to memorize it in your mind. You need to meditate on it. It's all three of those things. It's a great summary of everything this dad is trying to get across to his children. This is the seminal truth, not only of this fourth chapter, but you could argue apart from Chapter 1 verse 7 where the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and the beginning of wisdom. Obviously that's the defining verse, but linked with it is Proverbs 4:23. Guard your heart with all diligence for out of it flow the issues, the wellspring of life.

We need to start off by defining the heart, so let's give a definition of the heart. When the Bible speaks of the heart, it probably has something else in view than what we might normally think of when we use the word heart. We might say something like follow your heart. Or we might say trust your heart. Or we might ask what's your heart telling you to do. When we use those kinds of terminology and those kinds of phrases, very often we're linking our heart primarily to our emotions and feelings. That's not a bad thing per se. But it's not always the greatest advice unless we link it to these other truths that we're going to look at here. But when the Bible speaks of this matter of the heart, and it does a lot, the word heart appears over 1000 times in the Bible. A hundred



of those times just in the book of Proverbs. 1/10 of all of the uses of this word in all 66 books of the Bible come in the book of Proverbs. When Proverbs talks about the heart, it is talking about the core identify of who you are. When Proverbs talks about the heart, it is talking about who you are. Proverbs 27 in Verse 19: "As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man." Proverbs is just saying who you are in your heart of hearts is who you really are. That's you. That's your core identity. That's the way he's using this expression. It is the center of everything. So, when we understand, we understand that Solomon is not interested in some superficial response on the part of his children. He's not interested in some type of behavior modification on our part. He is interested in our being wise to the very core of our being and touching the very center of who we are and all that we are.

When the Bible uses the word heart, I want you to think of three things because all three of these are part of a proper understanding of how the Bible speaks of the heart. It certainly first of all speaks of our heart with regard to our will. Our will and the word heart are linked together in Scripture. Exodus 7 says that Pharaoh hardened his heart. It's talking about his will. He determined, he decided. You talk about a foolish man. He decided that in his heart he would oppose the God of heaven, and that's what He did. He staked out this position based on his will and his determination the decisions that he was going to make about life. He was going to oppose God.

The Bible speaks of the heart in terms of thoughts, of our intellect. Hebrews 4 says that the Word of God is alive and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. It's piercing and it's dividing and determining the very thoughts and intents of our heart. What's it talking about? It's talking about our intellect. It's talking about the way that we think. So, we've got the will already. Now the intellect, our thoughts.

Then thirdly, it is true that our heart is about our emotions. Proverbs 15 and verse 15: "All the days of the afflicted are evil, but the cheerful of heart has a continual feast." It is talking about our emotional well-being. Verse 30 of that same chapter: "The light of the eyes rejoices the heart and good news refreshes the bones." You know, it's often said that all you have to do is look into somebody's eyes. I'm not trying to weird anybody out, but you know sometimes you can just look at somebody and you can see

in their eyes maybe a sadness, a joy, a sense of loss of hurt and pain. So really, our eyes do just exactly what Proverbs says. They reveal our heart.

When Solomon talks about the heart, when the Bible talks about the heart, he's talking about all of these things. That's why he says in verse 23 it's the wellspring of life. Your heart is the wellspring of life. You can think of it in that way. That's why it's all about who we really are and what we're thinking and what makes us tick. It's behind everything that we do. In 1 Samuel 16 we read that all we can do is we look on the outside. God is the one who looks at the heart. The heart. What makes you the way you are. What makes you think the thoughts that you think, the choices that you make, the intellect and the thinking behind that. And then, of course, your emotions.

Very quickly, I want to give you a description of the heart from Proverbs because it's so extensive. Just look at this list of different things that Proverbs is going to say about the heart. It's hard, merry, wide, sensual, bitter, deceitful, it turns away from instruction, angry, clean – the list goes on. Proverbs is capturing in that word who we really are, but the point is this. The human heart hasn't changed over time. This is the heart that all of us possess in some measure or another. Matthew 15. Remember Jesus gets into this knockdown drag out with the religious leaders over outward things and outward traditions. Do you remember what Jesus said in that 18<sup>th</sup> verse when He is zeroing in on the truth of these guys that what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart. This defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts – murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands. That doesn't defile anybody! They're all hung up on the fact that Jesus's disciples aren't washing their hands in the proper way. Jesus is just peeling it all back and he's saying that they're so worried about the outward appearance that they're neglecting what's going on their hearts. That's the point that Jesus makes and the principle is simply this: Life does not flow from outside to in. It flows from the inside out. That's why Proverbs 4:23 is so important.

So, let's look again at this matter of protecting the heart. What are we called to do? We are first of all to watch the heart. Guard your heart, he says. Keep it. Keep means that you're thinking of it. It means to protect. It means to enclose, to barricade. In our day of security enhancement all over the place and the government buildings,

everything is changed as needed. All of this security! And what are they doing? They're watching. They're keeping. They're being mindful of the needed security. We are to do what he says with vigilance. We're to do it with diligence.

Again, go back to the NIV where it says above all else. This is your number one priority. This is your number one concern. Don't let your guard down in this area. Above every other responsibility that you have, the number one responsibility according to Proverbs 4:23 is guard your heart. You push back and say well yeah, I'm a dad and I'm a husband. I'm a provider and I've got a lot going on in my life. I'm a mom and a wife. I've got work. He's saying prioritize it all and at the top of that pile is this statement that above all else your number one priority for today and every day that follows to maintaining this vigilance and watch over your heart.

Why do you suppose we need to do that? What do you think might be involved? Let's look at that quickly. First of all, why? Why should we do this? Because he tells us guard your heart with all diligence for out of it flows the wellspring of life. First of all, recognize the treasure that is your heart. Recognize the treasure that is your heart. Those two phrases "above all else" and "the wellspring of life" say to me that this is the most precious possession that we have. Guard it. Watch it.

I don't know what day it is in your neighborhood, but in our neighborhood Thursday is trash day. Everybody dutifully has filled up their big blue container and Wednesday night or Thursday morning early, we take it down to the street. We've got a neighborhood watch group and we've got people on the Facebook page that are watching out and making comments about the neighborhood. I've never seen or heard anybody encouraging any of us to go and watch our big blue container during the night. Why not? Because it's worthless. It's trash. We don't care. We want our big blue containers empty in the morning, but we don't care about that. It's got no value to us. We've already disposed of it. This is the exact opposite of that. This is your heart that you're to be treasuring.

Listen to this. Your heart is where God speaks to you. Your heart is where God directs you day-to-day. Your heart is the indwelling place of the Spirit of God. Your heart is precious. Your heart is worthy to be guarded. That's the point that he's driving here. It's from the heart that we love the Lord our God with everything that we have. It's from

the heart that Proverbs 3:5 said that we trust in the Lord with all our heart. Romans 10, Paul says, it's from the heart that we make this confession and are justified. It's from the heart, Jesus said, out of which flows rivers of living water. I want you to picture your heart as your most precious possession. It's the Fort Knox of your life. Nothing gets into your heart except that the guard and the sentry is standing watch with all diligence allows it to get in. This great reservoir of water is the picture that you should have of your heart. Out of that flows all the tributaries into all of your life.

The second reason. It is under constant attack. This imagery of guarding is because it has value, but it's also under constant attack. It's under constant attack. It's engaged in a battle and it's in a combat zone. There are casualties for people who are not especially alert, not aware of what's going on with the enemy. The enemy is going to use every weapon that he has at his disposal. That's why Paul says in Ephesians 6 to put on the whole armor of God. And be alert! Peter says in 1 Peter 5 Satan is like a roaring lion. He is going around seeking whom he may devour. So be alert! Be aware! Be on guard! We're under constant attack.

Now, what are we going to do? What can we do to keep our heart protected? I would suggest first of all we would begin with a negative. Keep the trash out. Keep the trash out. Guard the heart because that's the wellspring of your life. That's where God is speaking to you and that's where you are seeking after Him. That's why we need to keep the junk out. Look again at verses 24, 25, 26 and 27. It is just speaking to the practical nature of that as our day-to-day life. Hebrews 12 says lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily besets you. You're going to be looking at Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, yes, but you've got to lay aside all of the distractions, all of the hindrances, all of the sin that so easily entangles.

Listen. Some trash is easy to identify, isn't it? Some trash that comes our way is easy to identify and we don't even need to list all of the things that we would immediately say I don't want that in my life. Still, some of that gets by the guard, doesn't it? But then there's a thousand other things that we just have learned to tolerate. There are things that we just allow to slide by and they come in, and they clog up our heart and junk things up. They're really not to be there. So, we've got to learn to identify what

those things are and to keep them out of our heart. All of them have to go. There can be no tolerance.

On the positive side. Energize the heart with truth. Go back to verse 1: Hear, my son, your father's instruction. Verse 10: Hear, my son, accept my words. Look at verse 20: My son, be attentive to my words. Get the wisdom of God into your life, the Word of God into your heart. That's why he says what he does in verse 21 and 22: Don't let them escape your sight. Jesus said it's the truth that is going to set you free. Jesus said it's the truth that is going to set you apart. Jesus said it's the truth that is going to cleanse you. Do you want to know what a heart that is pursuing and energized by the truth looks like? Just keep reading Psalm 119. Nothing will energize your heart like reading Psalm 119. The most important thing about you is your heart. Guard it like your life depended on it because, my friend, it does.

What do we take away? Get the Word of God into your life. That is the greatest thing that you can do for your heart, for your mind, for your will, for your emotions. Get in to the Word. It's that Word that tells us about who God is. It tells us about who we are. It tells us about our great need for a Savior. It tells us that all that we can do by way of our human efforts and work will never be enough. It tells us that all Jesus did in His life and death on the cross was all that needed to be done. We call that the good news of the Gospel. God calls on us to simply believe that, to receive the gift of eternal life, and to begin this journey on this way of wisdom.

Let's pray. Father God, how grateful we are for this amazing book of wisdom that imparts to us life itself. Thank You for this gift. Thank You for Your Spirit, Lord. Impress this truth upon us for Your glory, for our advancement in our walk with You, and for the lifting up of the gospel of Your grace. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.