

**Text: Proverbs 4:20-27**

**Title: “Street Smarts ... For the Heart”**

It’s time for us to get into the Word. God has given us the book of Proverbs to show us the “Street Smarts” we need to live a life that honors God. Now open your Bibles to Proverbs 4. Proverbs is difficult to preach verse by verse from the first chapter to the last because it is arranged topically. Solomon may have composed and collected these proverbs to serve as the curriculum for the training of young leaders who would take their place in his vast royal administration. Students you will be wise to keep the book of Proverbs close throughout your life. As I read beginning in v.20 you will see that Solomon is conducting a body scan to make sure that every part of the student’s body is being used to honor God and live out His wisdom. It begins with the EARS.

**Read Proverbs 4:20.** With our ears we receive and retain the instruction of wise people God puts around us. Then it goes to the EYES.

**Read Proverbs 4:21.** Eyes help us focus on the written form of God’s revelation in His Word. Then it goes to the BODY.

**Read Proverbs 4:22.** And here it comes to the most important part of our life ... the HEART.

**Read Proverbs 4:23.** The heart is the vault where the treasures of wisdom are stored, and from which those treasures are brought out for living. I’ll come back to this in a moment because this passage hinges on this verse. Next it comes to the MOUTH.

**Read Proverbs 4:24.** When our hearts are right the words of our mouths will be right. Then Solomon comes back to the EYES.

**Read Proverbs 4:25.** Next the focus turns to our FEET that take us where wisdom leads us.

**Read Proverbs 4:26-27.** The life of wisdom has to be walked out in the streets of life. But it is clear that the most important part of this body scan is the HEART. Back to...

**Proverbs 4:23 - Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.**

The heart is not the organ in our chest cavity that pumps blood. “Heart” is the word the Bible typically uses to describe who you are on the inside rather than who you are on the outside. It encompasses our mind, our will and our emotions. It’s who you are as a person on the inside. And the heart must be guarded because it is the spring from which everything in your life flows.

There’s a command to “guard your heart.” Literally, the text says, “guard with all vigilance.” The word was used in ancient times to describe the act of guarding over something or someone in a cage or jail cell. So the question is, “Why does our heart need that kind of vigilant guarding?” There are at least two reasons:

## **OUR HEARTS ARE VULNERABLE.**

**ILLUSTRATION** – We have one of the greatest zoos in the country right here in Fort Worth. They tell us that our zoo houses nearly 100 endangered species. That means that if they are not carefully managed the species is vulnerable to extinction. And even though we can still go and look at them, they are carefully guarded and protected by zoo employees because they are vulnerable. And our heart needs to be guarded because it is vulnerable.

Our hearts are vulnerable to sin. The Bible says...

**Proverbs 19:3 - A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD.**

Even when we see sinful foolishness ruining our lives, there's something in our heart that causes us to still rage against the Lord.

**Jeremiah 17:9 - The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?**

Our hearts are also vulnerable to the influence of the devil. In Acts were told about a husband and wife in the church who deceived the church in the amount they gave in the offering. And the Apostle Peter confronted the husband first...

**Acts 5:3a - "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit..."**

Our hearts are vulnerable to discouragement and fear. Jesus knew this about His disciples on the night before He was crucified for our sins, and He said...

**John 14:1 - "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.**

Our hearts have to be guarded because they are vulnerable, but also because...

## **OUR HEARTS ARE VALUABLE.**

**ILLUSTRATION** – If you get on an airplane today and fly to London, get in a cab and go to the Tower of London there you will find what may be the most valuable collection of jewels in the world ... the Crown Jewels. These priceless jewels are displayed behind such thick glass that they could never be touched. They're guarded because they are valuable.

So it is with our hearts. Our hearts are valuable because Solomon said says that the heart is the wellspring of life.

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

The heart is valuable because it that part of you that connects with God. We focus most of our energies on the outer person. Stop to think about what you did to get ready for church this morning. Most of it was focused on the outer you ... what others see. But the Bible says that God looks upon the heart. Are we as concerned taking care of the part of us that God sees as most valuable ... our inner person.

**Matthew 5:8 - Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

It's when our hearts are pure that we can really connect with God. But here's our big problem. Only the pure in heart will see God; our hearts are not pure. In fact Jesus said...

**Matthew 15:19 - For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.**

And here's where the Gospel comes in. We can't have a relationship with God because our hearts are poisoned by sin. And God knew that and sent His Son to die and be raised again so we could be born again with a new heart with new desires, new motivations and new longings after God. When we trust in Christ, He changes us starting with our heart. But then we still have to guard our hearts. So the next big question is how do we go about guarding our hearts?

### **STREET SMARTS FOR THIS WEEK:**

#### **1. Make God the first love of your heart.**

Our hearts belong to God. That's why the greatest command according to Jesus in...

**Mark 12:30 - Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'**

To love the Lord with our all your heart is to love Him with your mind, with your soul (emotions) and with your strength (body). Set your heart on loving God.

#### **2. Fill your thoughts with the Word of God.**

We read this earlier. Look back up to...

**Proverbs 4:20 - My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words.**

We're talking here about biblical knowledge. You need all kinds of knowledge to make it in life, and that's why education is important. But you can have more degrees than a thermometer

and still not have street smarts. The knowledge that changes the heart is the knowledge of the Word of God.

**Proverbs 4:21 - Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart;**

That word “within” means at the center or in the midst of your heart. Why?

**Proverbs 4:22 - for they are life to those who find them and health to a man’s whole body.**

That’s why the psalmist said...

**Psalm 119:11 - I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.**

Fill your thoughts with the Word of God.

### **3. Develop the habit of prayer.**

I said earlier that our hearts are vulnerable to anxiety and discouragement. Our hearts can be weighed down and broken. The Bible says that one way to guard your heart is to develop the habit of prayer.

**Philippians 4:6-7 - Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

### **4. Take control of your thought life.**

Remember that our thoughts are part of our “heart” ... of who we are. So we need to be careful what kind of chatter we allow to go on in our minds. Let me just give one example here. Many times thoughts are triggered by what we look at with our eyes. Jesus talked about this in...

**Matthew 5:28 - But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

What your eye looks upon will trigger thoughts in your heart. That’s why Solomon said in ...

**Proverbs 4:25 - Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you.**

Guard your heart by guarding your thoughts.

### **5. Be cautious in relationships.**

With our hearts we connect with God, but with our heart we also connect with other people. People can capture our hearts. We saw last week how parents need to capture the hearts of their children.

**Proverbs 23:26 - My son, give me your heart and let your eyes keep to my ways,**

When we fall in love with the person God would have us to marry, that other person captures our heart. And that emotional intimacy is a vital part of the marriage relationship. So if you're married, guard your hearts against emotional intimacy anyone other than your mate. Students and young adults, your heart becomes unguarded when you move too fast in a relationship ... when you become emotionally intimate with someone too quickly. When that happens we lose the ability to think clearly about God's will. Guard your heart until God is ready for you to give your heart to another.

## **6. Break free from idolatry.**

Idolatry happens whenever we put anything or anyone in the place of God in our lives. It happens when we turn to other things or other people for our ultimate sense of well-being and satisfaction. Idols capture our hearts, but as believers our hearts belong only to God. That's why in the OT when Israel went astray, God came after them.

**Ezekiel 14:5 - I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted me for their idols.'**

Break free from idols that capture our hearts.

## **7. Keep your heart humble.**

Pride so easily hardens our hearts toward God and toward others. That's why the Bible says...

**Proverbs 16:5a - The LORD detests all the proud of heart.**

And this is why we need Jesus. Jesus said...

**Matthew 11:29 - Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.**

We need Jesus. That's why when we are saved it starts in the heart. Your heart must be converted.

**Romans 10:9 - That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**

**ILLUSTRATION** – A story caught my attention about a guy named Michael Plant who was an avid and expert sailor. He had already sailed around the world twice and in 1992 he spent \$650,000 building a state of the art sailboat to race around the world a third time. He started out from New York City on the 24,000 mile race. But within a week he began to experience difficulties. He sent out a radio distress signal that was picked up by a Russian freighter. After a month of searching they finally discovered Plant's sailboat, upside down in the ocean. Plant was nowhere to be found. I don't know a lot about sailboats but I know that for a sailboat to stay upright there has to be more weight below the water line than above water line. That weight is in what is called the keel of the boat. That was the problem for Michael Plants boat. When they found Plant's boat upside down it revealed that the heavy part of the keel was missing. Somehow it was torn away from the hull of the boat.

That's our problem as humans as well. Think of your heart as what is below the water line of your life ... where no one else but God can see. If there's not weight there, you'll never withstand the storms of life.