

Before I begin today I have been asked to clarify a statement I made last month when I spoke on Mother's Day. Not because it was inaccurate, but because it painted one of my parents, mom, in a positive light and another parent, dad, in a less than positive light. I stated, and I quote, "In my house growing up if you wanted to do well on the test you studied with mom because she was going to ensure you knew word for word every single thing on the study guide and quiz you until it was perfect. If you wanted to watch tv while sorta kinda studying the paper then you would ask dad." Again, this was 100% accurate. However, what I should have said was, but if you return to school 20 years after you finished the first time and need someone to edit all of your grad school papers then there is no better man for the job than my dad. It's all fun and games until the red pen comes out. The official statement I've been asked to read is my dad was an equal partner in my education and deserves equal credit for my educational accomplishments.

Now that we've got that cleared up we can move on! This morning we are talking about receiving fatherly advice. Because that's what dads do – they give advice. Advice that you didn't even ask for is freely given by dads. More often than not I didn't want advice or a fix to the problem I just wanted to state that I had a problem and have someone say – that sounds terrible. But, dads will do what dads will do. Bless them.

We'll land in Proverbs 4, but it's gonna take us a minute to get there. King David was anointed by God to lead all of Israel. He had a bunch of sons, but God specifically chose Solomon to inherit the throne. To be clear Solomon was not the eldest son – simply the anointed son to follow David as king. When David was coming to the end of his life he called the people together and gave them a charge to follow the commands of the Lord, and then he gave this advice to his son, Solomon: **"And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the**

**God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever. Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house as the sanctuary. Be strong and do the work.” 1 Chronicles 28:9-10** It was good advice from a father –

**David’s fatherly advice to Solomon:**

**Acknowledge the Lord**

**Wholeheartedly serve the Lord**

**Willingly decide to serve the Lord**

**Seek the Lord**

**Be strong in the Lord**

**Do the work the Lord has commanded you to do**

So, Solomon starts out following this advice. One night the Lord appeared to Solomon and said ask for whatever you want me to give you. Solomon asks not for wealth or long life or an end to his enemies but rather for a discerning heart and wisdom to govern the nation.

The Lord grants this request and Solomon grows to become the wisest man in the world.

People came from all over the world to talk to him and pick his brain on various topics. But, compromise entered his heart and he stopped serving God wholeheartedly as his father advised. He stopped seeking the Lord and acknowledging God’s presence in his life. When it came time for Solomon to write his own fatherly advice it became the literal embodiment of the old saying – do as I say and not as I do. Solomon had been given good advice and in

Proverbs 4 he's going to give good advice. But, advice is only truly good if it's followed, obeyed, applied, and lived out.

As we talk through the advice Solomon gives his children keep that in mind. Solomon knew it was good advice – but he didn't follow his own words. Today, you can agree without obeying. But, these words will only really bring you life if you choose today to heed this fatherly advice.

Proverbs 4 begins this way, **“Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching. When I was a boy in my father’s house, still tender, and an only child of my mother, he taught me and said, “Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live. Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendor.” Listen, my son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many.” Proverbs 4:1-10**

Two things worth noting here about the book of Proverbs. One – wisdom is treated as a woman here in this book. It's poetic and so wisdom is personified as female. Later in Proverbs we'll read he who finds a wife finds a good thing – here in chapter 4 it's similar language being used. It's basically saying – the one who finds wisdom finds a good thing. Stay in right relationship with wisdom and things will be good. Get wisdom, get understanding, don't let it go once you've found it. The second thing is – the book of

Proverbs has a lot of metaphors – again, poetry – and one of those metaphors is the path. Following the right path becomes a way of saying follow and obey the Lord and the way that He leads. In Proverbs, the path you choose to take is a matter of life and death. It's not choosing the right path will lead to life or lead to death – no the path is a path of life or a path of death. It isn't just about the destination it's about the journey. Proverbs urges us to choose the path or the journey *of life* and not the journey or path *of death*.

So, when Solomon says accept what I say and the years of your life will be many – he means it. Following the path the Lord has for us is a way of living and ultimately it's what Jesus announced when He said – the thief – or the enemy of our souls – comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. The fatherly advice today begins this way – listen to what I'm about to say, don't walk away from it, hold onto it, obey it, find wisdom and don't let go.

Then we get to the summation – the best advice he has to give and that's what we want to focus on this morning. This is the advice you're being given today so let's explore it. **“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.”**

**Proverbs 4:22-27**

Or, in other words:

**Guard your heart**

**Watch your mouth**

**Fix your gaze**

## Stay on the path

Solomon said **Guard your heart** for it is the wellspring of life. My father's advice to me my whole life was guard your heart and guard your call. The reason was advice that came from a sermon he preached that I'll never forget. Guard your heart because if it can be bought the devil will name your price. Here's why guarding our heart is important. Guards are posted at places where something of value resides. Think of every major theft movie you've ever seen – I love a good heist. Look this isn't a sermon about not stealing okay. I'm making a point here. In every good movie where the plot is about a robbery whatever they're attempting to steal is always heavily guarded. If it wasn't the movie would be really short and would actually become a who-dun-it. The difficulty in stealing the diamond or the necklace, or the priceless art comes in finding a way to hack the security around it. It's the lasers or the alarm or the ever changing code or the vault that can't be cracked or the armed guards. And the reason why they go through all the trouble and why it's worth all the effort is because of how valuable the treasure is.

Here's what's of valuable inside of us. The Apostle Paul referred to it as treasure in jars of clay – meaning us. King James said earthen vessels. We're just the container – what's inside of us is a treasure. Here's what it is: **“We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” 2 Corinthians 4:10**

The good news of Jesus – that He came and lived, and died, and rose again, and taught us about true life, life to the full, real kingdom living – that's the treasure we guard. That's the life that has been handed to us. Paul would give his son in the faith some fatherly advice – “Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care.” He then tells him the danger to not guard your heart is that you'll wander from the faith as others had in fact done.

The radical, indescribable, beautiful, good news of Jesus is announced to us. The Messiah has come and that means those who have been in bondage to sin are set free, the poor hear good news, the sick are healed, those living in darkness now have light breaking through, those whose lives were on the ash heap are now being remade into something beautiful, the brokenhearted are whole again, and those who were wronged will now have justice. Jesus has come and that changes everything if we let it. Hold onto it. It's valuable. It's a priceless treasure. Hold on to Jesus. Hold on to what's been entrusted to you. Guard it, guard your heart, guard the treasure, the message of Jesus, keep the faith, and you'll walk in the path of life.

### **Watch your mouth**

Again, the verse said – put away perversity and keep corrupt talk far from you. Other translations used words like – devious, deceitful, lies, gossip, crooked, false. Our mouths can get us into so much trouble. I can't remember an instance in my childhood, teenage, or adulthood where I got in trouble for something I'd done – I wasn't a cheater, I didn't steal. But getting in trouble for something I said – oh all the time. If you talk as much as I do you're bound to have to apologize for a wrong or unkind word on the daily. I can remember getting in trouble at school for talking or for arguing my case. I can remember having to stay after class getting in trouble for talking – both at school and here in Sunday School. I have a great memory of being in college at CBC and chatting away to whatever friend was beside me and the professor saying – Miss Taylor would it be alright with you if we started class now! Go right ahead.

The Bible has hundreds of references to our mouths, lips, tongue, words, and speech. King David said, “keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies.” And years later the Apostle Peter would quote him in his own letter.

In the New Testament, James takes up the mantle of advice columnist and wisdom giver from Solomon. Here’s what he said about our tongues, **“The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.”**

### **James 3:5-10**

When we talk about watching our mouth and our words we can easily reduce it to something that doesn’t affect us. Don’t cuss or take the Lord’s name in vain – that’s perverse and don’t lie – those are the commandments and we carry on. That’s not a wrong interpretation, but it’s a little narrow. It makes us feel better though – I was honest – I do think they’re the stupidest person who ever got elected to public office – so my words are not a problem. I didn’t lie.

The tongue is full of poison and James says with it we curse human beings who have been made in God’s likeness. The sermon is gonna pick up from here and I’ll make some more dad jokes in a second but let me be real clear here. Hate filled speech, racial slurs, and

derogatory comments towards people who do not look like you, act like you or vote like you have no place in the mouth of a believer who also praises the Lord. You cannot stand here and praise the Lord on Sunday and then walk out of here to verbally abuse your spouse or denigrate people on social media or make racist jokes. It cannot be. It is perverse, it is corrupt, it fails to see the image of God in others, and my advice to you today is to watch your mouth. Keep that sort of talk far from your lips for out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. Brothers and sisters in Christ we must do better, speak better, love better than those who do not know Jesus and have not been redeemed from an old way of speaking. Our words matter and that type of language is perverse and crooked and it will corrupt you from the inside out. The way we speak about others and to others must match with the language of praise that comes out of our mouth to the Lord. The Scripture says you cannot praise God and curse others. So let's make sure we watch our mouth and guard our heart.

And, here's some other good fatherly advice from a cartoon character – **If you can't say something nice don't say nothin' at all. – Thumper's Father**

### **Fix your gaze**

Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. What are we gazing at with our eyes and our heart? What are we longing for? Because if we have failed to guard our heart then our words will be impacted and our gaze will begin to drift and our eyes will rest on things or people, positions or causes instead of Jesus. I began working on this message a few weeks ago but if you're reading the Bible with us this year you'll recognize that nearly all the scriptures I've quoted have been from our reading this week. Isn't it great when God reinforces His word over and over again to our hearts?



So, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4 **“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” 2 Corinthians 4:18** Too often we get our eyes fixed on what we can see – what we can see is what will make us happy in this moment. We love instant gratification. Why did you do that? I don’t know – I just wanted to. I didn’t really think about it. It felt good, it seemed good, it made me happy. What we can see is what everyone else around us has and we’d like that too so we take our eyes off of Jesus and what is eternal so that we can get ahead, cut some corners to make more money, make sure the scholarships are intact, make our heart happy with a different, better, newer, more exciting relationship. We fix our eyes on what we can see on our right and left. We gaze too long at the things of this world and in the process we lose sight of Jesus.

Maybe some of us need to refocus – fix again our eyes on Jesus – because everything else is just temporary. Fix our gaze on what’s before us – eternity. The time is too short – don’t get distracted by what’s not going to last. We live in light of eternity. We live in light of the knowledge that Jesus is coming again. So don’t get too attached to things that are here one moment and gone the next. And on the flip side – don’t lose sight of the important relationships in your life over arguments that are only temporary and have no eternal value.

And, when we fix our gaze on what’s ahead, when we truly focus on Jesus we begin to notice things we’ve never seen before about Him. Since all my movie references were from the 90’s I’ll throw in another reference of those 3D pictures that if you stared at long enough another picture came out. Just when you think you’ve seen all you can about Jesus

there's a new picture that emerges. His beauty, His majesty, His goodness, His love, His mercy – there's no end. Gaze at Jesus. Keep gazing. Fix your eyes on Him.

### **Stay on the path**

Make level paths for your feet, take paths that are firm, keep your foot from evil. The way in which you do all of that – is to let Jesus lead you on the path of Life. Here's what else

Proverbs 4 has to say about this path of life: **“Listen, my son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many. I instruct you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble. Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life. Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evildoers. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way. For they cannot rest until they do evil; they are robbed of sleep till they make someone stumble. They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.”**

### **Proverbs 4:10-19**

The way of wisdom, if followed, will lead to straight paths. So once again the advice here is to hold onto wisdom, hold on to the instruction we find in the word of God, guard our hearts, guard the treasure inside of us, guard our faith and when we do our steps will be ordered of the Lord, they won't be hampered, the crooked places will be straightened out, we won't stumble or even stub our toes. And, again we're encouraged to stay on the path of life – remember the metaphor – it's not just a path that leads to life or leads to death – it's a path marked with life or destruction. The path of life is bright and sunny, but the path of

destruction and death is full of evil, wickedness, and violence and it's so very dark. Solomon urges his children to not even step onto that path. Don't do it. It might look good, it might seem like it will be better, it might bring pleasure for a minute but it's destructive and will rob you of every good thing. Stay on the path of life.

I said at the beginning that advice is only good advice if we heed it. Solomon didn't take his own advice. He went down a path of destruction – he lost sight of the path of life, lost sight of the Lord, stopped guarding his heart, let his eyes gaze at the wrong things and stepped off the right path. He knew what to do – told his sons to do it – but failed to obey his own advice. The kingdom he led was split in two. His sin had devastating consequences for generations to come. Yet, he's still known to us as the wisest of men.

So if the wisest of men couldn't guard his heart or watch his mouth or fix his gaze or stay on the path then what makes us think we can? How can we do any better? Because of Jesus.

Remember, the Messiah has come – it's the treasure we hold on to – the treasure we guard. Jesus the Messiah has come announcing all the things we talked about earlier. And one day as He was teaching the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked him for a sign and both Matthew and Luke record Jesus making this announcement – One greater than Solomon is here. The wisest man who ever lived is still not as wise as Jesus. Because Jesus is not just wise He is Wisdom in the flesh. We recognize Jesus as all powerful, as mighty, as Savior, as King but sometimes we forget He's also the smartest person in the room.

How can we

**Guard our heart**

**Watch our mouth**

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We look to Jesus, the one even wiser than the one who gave us the advice to begin with.

Funny enough we can't live for Jesus without Jesus. Without the Holy Spirit taking up residence inside of us it's impossible, but with Jesus we can do it. When we're tempted to step off the path – look to Jesus. When we're about to say something hurtful, perverse or just plain wrong – remember Jesus – ask Him to help you. Ask Him if this is something you should say or type or entertain in your heart. Jesus is the wisest person in the room, He is Wisdom – He'll tell you what to say. When we've gotten our eyes fixed on the temporary pleasures of life and failed to live in light of eternity – look back to Jesus and recenter your attention. When we feel like giving up – look to Jesus and guard the faith that's been handed to you because the next generation is looking to you to hand them the faith of their fathers. We need to obey this Fatherly advice – we need to live it out – because we also need to pass it on.

Let's pray.