Chasing Wisdom: Inside Out

Proverbs 4:20-27

Back in 2015 an animated movie came out called *Inside Out* and if you've never heard of it, it was a really interesting idea for a movie. The movie follows a girl named Riley as her family moves from the Midwest to San Francisco and she adapts to her new location, new school, new friends and new way of life. That's part of the story, but what makes the movie so interesting are the main characters, Riley's emotions; Joy, Sadness, Fear, Anger, and Disgust. Each of the emotions is a little person operating inside of Riley. Joy is a bright and bubbly yellow girl. Sadness is a blue girl, and anger is a bright red little guy with spiky hair.

The movie goes back and forth between what's happening in Riley's life and what's happening inside of her as her emotions interact with one another and her thoughts, memories, desires, and decisions. The movie follows the 5 emotions as they navigate Riley's innermost person and try to help her handle the challenges that come with the move.

The movie gets at something true about human beings and the title reflects that. We really do live and operate from the inside out. I think Solomon would enjoy the idea of Inside Out and he's trying to communicate to his son and to us in the passage we will look at today the necessity of paying attention to our hearts and then letting our rightly ordered hearts control what we do. Make sure you are with me in Proverbs 4:20-27. We will finish Proverbs 4 today and then take a break from Proverbs until 2027 when we'll return to it and finish up our study in Proverbs 1-9. Here's what we will see today. **2 Rules for Ordering Your Life Toward Wisdom.**

1. **Attend to the Inside (vv. 20-23)**

This section of the lecture from Solomon to his son builds to verse 23, which is really the heart of this passage. Look at verse 23 with me. But before we get there, let's make sure we see how Solomon prepares us for this vital bit of wisdom. Look at verse 20.

I hope by now you are able to pick up on the system Solomon has going here as he presents these lectures to his son to motivate him to chase wisdom. He commands his son to be attentive to the words he has heard from Solomon. All of the lectures begin the same way and with an encouragement to hear and listen closely, but all of them also bring in unique insights into chasing wisdom. Notice verse 21.

Are Solomon's words that bring wisdom really trying to escape from our sight? In some ways yes. You do not drift into wisdom. Pursuit is necessary or wisdom will run away from you.

I took 3 years of Spanish in high school, but do I remember how to say anything other than "I need to use the restroom"? No I do not. And it's true, I didn't learn how to ask the question, just make the statement. Why can't I remember? Things slip from our minds and hearts and our proficiency in an area fades over time.

How do we void wisdom slipping away? We remain attentive as verse 20 tells us, but notice the second half of verse 21.

I was a teenager in the 1990's and we didn't have the option to stream movies or TV shows. We had to go to Blockbuster video. Because of that we would end up renting the same few movies over and over again and we became so familiar with those movies that certain phrases or lines from them became embedded on our hearts and minds. To this day a situation will come up and my first thought will be some line from a movie made in 1995.

Solomon says here the way to ensure that wisdom is with you is to pay such close and regular attention to it that Scripture is written on your heart. When you encounter a life circumstance the first thing to enter your mind is a passage or principle from the Bible. There are major benefits to this. Look at verse 22.

So, Solomon is making the case to his son in verses 20-22 that the words of wisdom should be written on his heart and this leads to the central thought of the passage regarding a life of wisdom. You need your heart to be saturated with wisdom because of what he says in verse 23. Look there again.

You can see with verse 21 and verse 23 that the focus here is on the heart. What exactly is the heart? To answer this question is to begin to talk about what makes a human being. The growing view of our culture is that human beings are simply raw material that can be molded in whatever way our desires happening to be running at the moment. There is no such thing as human nature or that which is typical of a human being.

The Bible gives us a robust picture of what it means to be human and how God has designed us to operate. In other words, there is such a thing as human nature. And it's vital that we grasp this because it helps us to live in wisdom, which means living with God's design for us. What makes up a human being?

There's an author named Dallas Willard who lays out the 6 basic aspects of a human life. These are what make us human and every human being operates in these areas. Here they are:

- Thought (images, concepts, judgments, inferences)
- Feeling (emotions, sensations)
- Choice (will, decisions, character)
- Body (actions, interactions with the physical world)
- Social Context (personal and structural relations to others)
- Soul (the factor that integrates all of the other aspects to form one life)

"These six 'aspects,' as we have called them, are distinct ranges of abilities, or things all human beings - but not squirrels or brussel sprouts - can and must do: we can and must feel, think, choose, act, and be acted upon through our bodies." - Willard

Now, your question here should be, where is the heart?! I thought verse 23 told us to keep our hearts because from it flow the springs of life. The heart is the Bible's way of putting together these first three. The heart thinks, feels, and chooses and all three of these happen together. We can't separate them out.

"Thinking, feeling, and choosing are different perspectives on the same, singular function. These three functions are necessarily interrelated. Thoughts can lead to feelings that can lead to choices; choices can also lead to thoughts that can lead to

feelings; just as feelings can lead to choices that can lead to new thoughts." – Jeremy Pierre

There's so much more we could say about the heart and how it works, but let's return to verse 23. The command is to keep your heart with all vigilance. What does this mean? This could be translated, "More than all your guarding, watch your heart". You protect a lot of things because they are valuable to you. Your family, your money, your time, your pets, home, and hobbies. You guard them from negative impact or harm.

Solomon's point to his son here regarding wisdom is this: If you are going to grow in wisdom, the thing you need to care for, guard, and pay attention to, more than anything else is your heart. Your thoughts, feelings, and will.

What does this look like practically? First, it means being aware of what's going on in your heart. What do you think about? What perspective do you have? Are you generally positive or negative? Do you see situations rightly? What are you feeling? How do you emotions shift and change? Are they appropriate to the circumstances you are facing? What are you wanting and choosing? Keeping your heart means first, knowing what's going on in there.

Second, let's combine the command to keep your heart above all else in verse 23 with the instruction given in verse 21 to keep the words of wisdom within your heart. The way to keep your heart is to constantly allow it to be shaped and influenced by the story of the Bible and the wisdom of the Bible. To keep your heart means to pay attention to it and then to allow Scripture to correct and form it. What does this include? All of the areas mentioned above. Thinking, emotions, and choices.

"A person who is prepared and capable of responding to the situations of life in ways that are 'good and right' is a person whose soul is in order, under the direction of a well-kept heart, in turn under the direction of God." – Dallas Willard

A well-kept heart is vital because of the second part of verse 23. Everything you are and do in life flows from your heart. And we see this reality in our second rule this morning.

2. **<u>Align the Outside (vv. 24-27)</u>**

This lecture from Solomon to his son has mentioned multiple body parts so far. In verses 20-23 they have been largely focused on the interior life of each person. But now they shift to the outward life. If you go back to Willard's six basic aspects of a human life, we now shift from the heart to the body and social aspects of our lives.

Change generally works like this. The remodeling of the interior life, the thinking, feelings, and will, leads to external changes. You can change the interior of a house and leave the outside untouched, but that doesn't work with a human being. The body or actions and social context will be impacted by a reformation of the heart

Notice this in verses 24-27 and how the exterior life is described. Your lips or speech. Your eyes and the direction of your life. Your feet and where they walk.

I'll just draw your attention to one area of your external life. The words you say are a direct result of what happens in your heart. Luke 6:45. In verse 24 the speech that comes from a twisted heart is crooked and devious. This speaks of lying, slander, and anything that doesn't line up with God's purpose in our speech. What is God's purpose? Ultimately, it's to honor Him and when it comes to human beings our speech is meant to give life and grace. Proverbs 18:21 and Proverbs 16:24. Are you the type of person whose words build up and give grace and enjoyment to life? Or, are you the type of person whose words convey death through grumbling, gossip, and negativity? Your words are one of the most prominent ways people can get a look into your heart.

And so, we must align our hearts and our actions. Look again at verses 25-27.

But the Israelites struggled with this in the OT didn't they? They could not look directly ahead and they couldn't keep their feet from swerving to the right or left. They were always out chasing other gods and looking for satisfaction in every place but the true source of joy. Why did they struggle so bad?

Well, they had God's clear instructions, but they didn't have a change in heart that is necessary to walk in wisdom and to change in one's thoughts, feelings, and choices.

Listen to what Moses told them in Deuteronomy 29:2-4. And this problem persisted until they were exiled from the land because of the disobedient and stubborn hearts. But God promised that he would rescue them from their twisted hearts by giving them new hearts with a new covenant. Listen to Jeremiah 31:31-34.

And this new covenant has been brought to us by Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. And here's what has changed. Romans 6:17-18.

And so now the opportunity is there to keep your heart by filling it with God's Word and trusting God's Word because of Christ. Let's Pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 11/22/26

- What's a movie in any genre that you've seen so many times certain lines are just stuck in your head?

- The sermon compared wisdom slipping away to forgetting a language you stopped practicing. What's a truth from Scripture or a season of spiritual growth that you've noticed fading over time?

- The sermon described wisdom being written so deeply on your heart that Scripture becomes your first instinct in a situation — like a movie quote that just surfaces automatically. What practices have actually helped God's Word get that deep for you?

- The sermon said that the growing view of our culture is that humans are simply raw material that can be molded in whatever way we want. What are ways that you have seen this view at work?

- And what's at stake if that view is right? What would we lose if there's no such thing as human nature?

- The sermon quoted Jeremy Pierre who said thoughts can lead to feelings that lead to choices — but feelings can also lead to choices that lead to new thoughts. Can you give an example of that cycle in your own experience?

- Verse 23 says to keep your heart 'more than all your guarding.' What's one way you actively try to do that, to pay attention to what's going on in your thinking, feeling, and choosing?

- Give an example of how change goes from the inside to the outside of a person.

- Do you think change ever begins with the outside of a person and then moves to the heart?

- What is a specific way you have experienced the heart change brought about by the New Covenant?