

Proverbs Chapter 4

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- [0 : 00] Proverbs chapter 4. Sorry, I didn't check. Has anyone got a church Bible number that I could shout out?
- 6-3-8. So if you've got a church Bible, it's on page 6-3-8. Oh, it is the same as mine. 6-3-8. Proverbs chapter 4. We're going to read the whole chapter, but we're going to think mainly about verse 23.
- 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 only a child of my mother, he taught me and said, lay hold of my words with all your heart. Keep my commandments 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.
- [1 : 12] Wisdom is supreme, therefore get wisdom. Though it costs 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.
- I will guide 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 evil men. Avoid it.
- Do not travel on it and turn from it and go on your own way. For they cannot sleep till they do evil. They are robbed of slumber till they make someone fall.
- [2 : 11] They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of the day.
- But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness. They do not know what makes them stumble. My son, pay attention to what I say. Listen closely to my words.
- Do not let them out of your sight. Keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body. 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. We pray. Please take a seat.
- [3 : 24] Let's just pray again as we come to God's word. Father, again, we thank you for every part of scripture. We believe that every word is from you. It's for a purpose.

And, Lord, as we come to this section of the Proverbs, we just ask that you would speak to us. Lord, teach us. Lord, help us to understand.

But, Lord, even more than just understanding, we pray that you would change us. That you would move us. That you would do your work through your word. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

I've got a little bit of a sort of Marmite sort of subject. You know, the sort of love it or hate it type thing. I wonder if any of you enjoy watching any of the emergency medical programs on television.

Is there a few? Is there a few people that absolutely hate it? There might be some. Yep. I watch them sometimes. Ambulance.

[4 : 29] 24 hours in A&E.; Helicopter ER. That's one of my favorites. Helicopter ER. Well, today, we're going to try an experiment. We're going to try some open heart surgery.

Right here in the church. And don't worry, I'm not going to mess up the carpet. We're going to begin to think not so much about the heart, the physical heart that's pumping blood around our bodies.

We're using the word heart as it is here in Proverbs chapter 4 and verse 23, where it says, Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

We're thinking of the heart in the way that it's speaking of the inner man, the center of our lives, the real you. Not the you that other people see, but the real you.

Your mind, your will, your emotions, your thought patterns. All these things are linked up when we talk about our hearts and when the Bible speaks about our heart being the wellspring of life.

[5 : 39] It's the very essence of who we are. You see, the world is worried about the outside, isn't it? The world looks upon us and wonders and thinks and reflects on the way that we behave in public.

The world looks on from outside and can't see what's going on in our hearts. But we're told that God cares about our hearts.

He cares about what's going on inside. Do you remember when David was anointed by Samuel in 1 Samuel 16, 7, and the various sons are going past?

And there's a little comment in verse 7. It says, For the Lord does not look at the things that man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

And so David seemed to be a young man who was just bothering with the sheep. He didn't seem to be anything special. He couldn't be anyone that Samuel would want to anoint. But no, he didn't look very impressive to anyone else.

[6 : 49] But the Lord saw his heart. And the Lord said, That's the one. So when I talk about open heart surgery, I'm asking you to begin to have a bit of a look inside.

To look inside and to be honest with what you find. Perhaps this evening you'll find that things aren't quite as they should be. Perhaps you'll find that things have declined somewhat since you last had a look inside.

Perhaps you'll find some great archery clogging filth that needs to be removed. Perhaps there will be some cleaning of some sort that's in order.

Or perhaps you'll find that all is well. Whatever you find, I encourage you to be honest with yourself and that we might be led to a place of joyful worship.

We thank the Lord for that sense in which we are no longer under condemnation. And so if you're doing this as a Christian, this is not about finding something to be condemned about.

[7 : 58] And if you're doing this as someone who's not a Christian, then what a joy to come to the point when you realise, as you look inside, that you really do need a saviour from outside. But be honest with yourself.

And the point is to lead us into worship. That we might find real joy in remembering that God is the one who heals. That God is the one who brings life.

He's the one who forgives and restores. So Proverbs 4 is an urgent message from a father to a son. He wants to tell his son to love wisdom and to turn from wickedness.

Really that's the whole of Proverbs, isn't it? That the father is saying to his son, I want you to walk in wise paths and I want you to turn away from wickedness. And I would suggest that the key verses of this Psalm, this proverb, are in those verses 20 to 23.

My son, pay attention to what I say. Listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight. Keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body.

[9 : 10] And above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life. I want to ask you a question. I want to ask you a few questions. But here's the first one. As you look inside, do you have a broken heart?

Do you have a broken heart? Now I don't mean the way that often we speak of a broken heart. I don't mean like a relationship that's gone sour, a relationship that's failed.

I don't mean through loss or bereavement. I'm not speaking about that sort of broken heart. Real those things are. I'm speaking of not so much a heart that's hurt, but a heart that's broken.

In the same way that a kettle is broken if it doesn't boil water. See, the testimony of the Bible is that the heart of the human problem, have you heard this?

Is the problem of the human heart. The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. It goes to the very center of our problem with God when we start looking in our hearts.

[10 : 18] Jeremiah 17.9 says this about the heart. The heart is deceitful above all things, desperately sick. Who can understand it? Jesus makes it plain that our heart is the source of evil in our lives.

It's our inner desires. It's our selfish attitudes. This is where our anger and our jealousy and our pride reside. All this comes from our hearts. Turn with me, if you'd like to, to Mark chapter 7 and read what Jesus had to say.

Mark chapter 7 and verse 14. 1-0-1-0, I think, in my Bible, if that's the same as yours.

1-0-1-0. 1-0-1-0. 1-0-1-0. 1-0-1-0. Mark chapter 7 and verse 14. Again, Jesus called the crowd to him and said, Listen to me, everyone, and understand this.

Nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him. Rather, it's what comes out of a man that makes him unclean. After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable.

[11 : 33] Are you so dull, he asked them. Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him unclean? For it doesn't go into his heart, but into his stomach and then out of his body.

In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean. He went on, What comes out of a man is what makes him unclean. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.

All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean. Is that what you find when you look in your heart?

Some of those things on that list? You know, God knows and searches our hearts. It's the prayer of the psalmist in Psalm 139.

Search my heart. Search my heart. See if there's any offensive way in me. Lead me in the way everlasting.

[12 : 46] The message of Proverbs 4 is this. Find true wisdom. Resist the temptation to sin and learn God's wisdom. Pay special attention to Solomon's godly wisdom.

Pay special attention to your parents' godly wisdom as you're growing up. Pay special attention, above all, to the wisdom of God's word and, of course, to wisdom as it's personified in the Lord Jesus.

And that's one of the wonderful ways that we can see Jesus in these Proverbs, that as we read about wisdom, we find that there we see Jesus speaking truth, leading us in right paths, showing us the way.

So Proverbs 4 is centering our thinking on our hearts and like a surgeon, we're sort of getting the layers peeled away until he gets to the root cause and he finds the root cause in man's heart.

And he's urging us to be vigilant about our hearts, to be wide awake, to be keeping our hearts closely and the NIV puts it to guard our hearts. He's saying our natural urges of our hearts are going to lead us the wrong way.

[14 : 09] So don't just follow your feelings. The world is saying if it feels good, just do it. You're following Nike, just do it. But the Bible is saying oh, be careful because some of those things that come from within are not good.

keep a check on yourself. And it reminds us as we think of this we should not blame external circumstances for our sin.

Some of them might explain some of the sins that we do but it does not excuse us for sin most definitely comes from within out of our own hearts. It's not caused by your food like Jesus was saying or by your health or by your nasty boss or by your spouse or lack of one or by the government.

Jesus is saying that our uncleanness our sin is coming from our heart and we need to own it. We need to acknowledge it. We need to repent from it.

We need to make changes. And so my first question is do you have a broken heart? Can you recognize that in the center of you is a heart that has this bias towards sin.

[15 : 24] It's broken. Can you see that it's a life threatening condition? If you continue to live according to your heart without making any changes it's going to lead to a separation from the living God.

But fortunately there is a cure. You see we are all confronted with this when we look inside. A sinful heart but there is a cure. And so my second question is do you have a brand new heart?

The great promise of God in fact it's right through the Bible not just in the New Testament and we can see it in the prophet Ezekiel is that God will forgive his wayward people and that he will give them a new heart.

God is not in the business of just behavior modification. So if you're coming to church because you think it's going to help you to be a good person and that's going to make you please God then you're doing the wrong thing.

Because God's not in the business of changing you from the outside in. He's in the business of changing you from the inside out. He's interested in your heart and he wants to give you a new heart that's going to make you want to live in a different way.

[16 : 37] That's how God works. He wants to get to the root of things. He's not just going to deal with the symptoms and make everything look alright so that when you walk down the street people think you're respectable.

That's not what he does. He works from the inside out. He transforms our hearts and then he makes us want to live in a way that pleases him. This is what it says in Ezekiel 36 25 to 27.

This is his promise what he's going to do for his people. He says I will sprinkle clean water on you and you'll be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.

I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh and I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

So you might say well how do I get this new heart? That sounds like a good deal. I can see that things are not right inside and I do need to be changed. And perhaps I do I've tried to change from the outside in and it's not working very well.

[17 : 45] So perhaps I do need to be changed from the inside. So what do I need to do? It's no surprise that we find in the New Testament the Lord's speaking about what we need to do to be born again to believe in this word.

Over and over again in Proverbs he's saying listen to my words. Look at verse 4 Proverbs 4 verse 4 He taught me and said lay hold of my words with all your heart keep my commands and you will live.

It's interesting there's something going on with the heart that's bringing life. It's the same in verse 21 and 22 Do not let them out of your sight keep them within your heart it's talking about the words verse 20 Hold them close to your heart for they are life to those who find them verse 22 and then again in verse 23 that we're looking at the heart is linked with the wellspring of life and it seems that the scriptures are pointing us to the word and what do we find in the word?

we find these invitations to receive and to believe upon Jesus so here's an example John chapter 1 and verse 12 Yet to all who received him to those who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God children born not of natural descent nor a human decision nor a husband's will but born of God this is what we mean if it's unfamiliar to you to hear someone speaking about being born again that our hearts are being renewed when God comes in when we trust in him when we believe in him the scriptures say that we become children of God born by God things start again afresh and then John chapter 3 is another example John chapter 3 and verse 3 poor Nicodemus is getting a bit confused in reply Jesus declared I tell you the truth no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again how can a man be born when he is old

Nicodemus asked surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born and Jesus answered I tell you the truth no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit flesh gives birth to flesh but spirit gives birth to spirit you should not be surprised at my saying you must be born again the wind blows wherever it pleases you hear it sound but it cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going and so it is with everyone born of the spirit we receive a new heart when we believe in the son of God Jesus who came to die for us when we put our faith and our trust in what he has done there is new life there is a new heart there is a heart that's empowered by the spirit of God that's tuned into God who hears his voice who responds to conviction of God a heart that wants to do God's will and God's way a heart that will be shaped by God a heart that has received forgiveness and still wants to go out and serve and become like God wants us to be only Jesus can bring us this new heart you can try any other way and many people who come to faith in Christ have tried many many other ways but there's no other name under heaven given to men by which we can be saved only Jesus can deal with the problem at its root cause right inside our hearts

[21 : 42] Romans 10.10 says it's with the heart that one believes and is justified I wonder this evening is your heart as hard as stone is your heart unfeeling is your heart unconcerned and unaffected by God's word is it pursuing its own goals and desires perhaps you can sense perhaps you've been a Christian for a while and you're beginning to sense these things again just for the first time tonight or for the thousandth ask God to renew your heart ask him to soften your heart ask him to take control again of your heart be encouraged by Jeremiah 29 verse 13 that says you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart God doesn't play cat and mouse games when we're seeking after him you'll find him so the last question

I want to ask is how do we take care of this new heart that God has given us and Spurgeon uses a really helpful analogy of a reservoir and so you'll have to forgive me for the next few minutes we're going to be swapping and switching between two analogies or mixing my metaphors between a reservoir and a heart a physical heart you'll see where we head but this is a place a reservoir is a place where a large quantity of cool fresh clean water is stored and then pumped from that and it goes into the houses and streets and villages of a town bringing goodness and life to all those houses the lovely fresh clean water comes from I was looking it up for your area apparently it's up in Castle Road is it the reservoirs underground reservoirs clean water is stored there and it flows into your homes and brings life keeps you healthy and so just as your heart pumps oxygenated rich blood through your arteries around your body your spiritual heart needs to be pumping life giving truth around the pipe network of your body affecting every aspect of your life and that's why it says guard your heart it is the wellspring of life your heart is the place of like a reservoir of life and so there's three things I want to say about this reservoir to help us to think about taking care of this heart that reservoir or heart needs to be full the verse itself pictures that a wellspring of life an abundance of this liquid ready to bring life to all around a reservoir needs to have an input as well as an output somehow that reservoir needs to be kept full if nothing goes into it then nothing's going to come out of it and we need to be filled by

God we need to be filled by his word if we want to be empty and dry and struggling to exist as Christians then we simply need to stop feeding ourselves we need to stop reading the Bible we need to not care about being filled with God's spirit but if we want our reservoirs to be full we need to be feeding upon God and his word we need to be asking God to fill us we need to be asking God to guide us we need to be full that's the first thing our hearts need to be full need to be fed need to be nurtured this reservoir or heart also needs to be pure ask God to help you to work towards that same that your heart might be pure you remember in Psalm 51 10 David is confessing his sin and he says create in me a clean heart oh God renew a right spirit within me it doesn't matter how much water is in that tank on

Castle Road it doesn't matter how good the pump is but something is not going to be good if that reservoir is full of dirty water it's going to pump dirty water into your houses and when you drink you might not even know you might be able to see it but you'll be drinking something that's going to be bad for you so we need to guard our hearts by trying to keep them clean we need to keep short accounts of our sin we need to confess our sin regularly we need to confess our sin to others we've sinned against we need to guard our hearts by allowing God's word to judge and to cleanse us we need to guard our hearts by being sensitive to the conviction and the guidance of the Holy Spirit keeping them soft and ready to listen and obey the Lord only the Lord has power to cleanse our dirty hearts and to make them into a spring of clean fresh water another program that

I sometimes watch is Bear Grylls doing his things out in the wild or the other guy that does it I watch one of them you might have watched some of these things where he goes up to a pond that's full of stagnant water and he gets a sock and he sticks a bit of charcoal and a few leaves and stuff and he starts sucking it and he's telling you how all this goo in the socks is taking all the grot out and it's lovely fresh water I'm not convinced I'm not convinced the only one who can cleanse our hearts is the Lord Jesus and it's important that our hearts are pure it's going to be a struggle it's going to be a lifelong struggle but only Jesus can cleanse us perhaps you need forgiveness today perhaps if you're looking at your heart it looks a bit mucky perhaps in that sort of sense you feel a bit mucky today the answer is the same turn to

[28 : 20] Jesus he's the only one that can cleanse us our hearts need to be full and they need to be pure and lastly our hearts need to be undivided if a reservoir has too many outlets it's going to get exhausted and it will just be sending a trickle in each direction it's going to be ineffective and when you turn your shower on and you're expecting it to blast down you see this little trickle coming out it's useless likewise our hearts need to be focused our hearts need to be focused on that one great task to pursue God's wisdom through the Lord Jesus Christ in Psalm 86 David speaks about this in his

Psalm about wanting an undivided heart Psalm 86 and verse 11 teach me your way O Lord and I will walk in your truth give me an undivided heart that I may fear your name I will praise you O Lord my God with all my heart I will glorify your name forever for great is your love towards me you have delivered me from the depths of the grave I wonder if there's things as we just think and do a little bit of our surgery on our own hearts whether you can sense that your heart's divided but the honest truth is that you do love God that you want to serve him but there are some other really major things in your life that are diverting your attention away from him there are things perhaps that aren't good or perhaps they are good things but they're taking your attention away from following the Lord and you'll know that if that's the case perhaps you're literally just too busy with too many things to pursue the

Lord with all your heart perhaps your allegiance is divided in too many directions trying to please everybody and failing to please anyone perhaps you're being pulled away from God by one thing that's really got hold of your heart it's trying to grapple with you and pull you away from the Lord Jesus perhaps you're deliberately avoiding God you're diverting something you're trying to pretend that God doesn't notice God wants your heart to beat with his do you remember the greatest commandment Jesus said Mark 12 verse 30 love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul with all your mind and with all your strength may we long for and ask for and work for undivided hearts so I don't know what mess is around you

I don't think we've got any blood anywhere let's finish this surgery just by reflecting on the things that we've been considering what did you find what will you find perhaps you want to go home and think about it some more did you find a broken heart did you find in there the traces of your human nature which is to rebel against God you found the things you don't like the evil that's inside of you have you found a new heart have you have you discovered again perhaps afresh perhaps for the first time that God wants to give you a new heart and I just want to ask you again are you taking care of your heart is it full are you feeding it is it pure are you cleansing it through Jesus and is it undivided is it undivided let's pray that before the penalty falls through so in pregn he has falling he tummy come to me relax maybe and do the that other wish was to leave her