Theme: To build a wise life, we must guard our hearts from evil, fill them with God's Word, and depend on His Spirit to shape our desires and guide our actions.

I. A Poisoned Well Spreads Sickness

A. June 2015 - 548 got sick at zipline tour in Gatlinburg, TN

B. Eventually discovered it was from water in coolers along the course

C. All the coolers got water from the same well

D. Today: the well from which all character flows - the heart

II. The Importance of Guarding the Heart

A. An essential wisdom teaching

My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. [21] Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. [22] For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. [23] Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Proverbs 4:20-23

1. He is saying PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO THIS!!!
2. My old chemistry professor would stomp on the floor
3. Do not let your mind wander – this is essential!

B. To build a wise life, guard your heart!

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Proverbs 4:23

1. Guard the heart with ALL VIGILANCE!
2. Whatever you do, keep close watch on your heart!
3. Like a guard at the city gates protecting the city from enemies trying to get in, keep a close guard on your heart!

4. The reason – your heart is the spring/source

from it flow the springs of life. Proverbs 4:23 ESV

for everything you do flows from it. NIV2011

for it is the source of life. CSB

for it determines the course of your life. NLT

a. Biblically, the heart is the seat of our thoughts, emotions, desires, and will. Because the heart is where we think, desire, and decide, it is the source of our actions.

b. This proverb shows this in its structure

1. Vv20-23 – heart as the root of our character
2. Vv20-24 – the fruit of actions

c. Jesus teaches the same thing

And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. [21] For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, [22] coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. [23] All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." Mark 7:20-23

1. What is inside will come out of us – good or evil
2. The Pharisees were focused on external purity, but Jesus was focused on the state of the heart, for this would determine character and actions in the long run.

5. This means there are no simple steps to seeing our character changed, for our actions and character flow from our heart. Consequently, we must guard and shepherd our hearts if we wish to build a wise life.

III. Guarding My Heart

A. I guard my heart by not allowing evil influences in

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. [24] Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you. [25] Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. [26] Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. [27] Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil. Proverbs 4:23-27

1. The word keep includes the idea of 'guard'
2. We need to be like guards at the gates – carefully controlling what is allowed to enter our hearts.
3. The actions described in vv. 24- 27 are mainly about avoiding evil.
4. The first step in forming a godly heart is not allowing it to be filled with ungodly influences.
5. Because we are in the world, we will have contact with all types of things – and they will affect us differently, and we need to guard accordingly.
6. Signs I need to restrict access to my heart
    a. Things that cause greed or covetousness
    b. Things that cause sexual lust
    c. Things that cause fear or anger
    d. Things that make it harder for me to forgive
    e. Things that promote pride or undermine humility
    f. Things that prompt me to use foul language
    g. Things that undermine faith and strengthen doubt
    h. Things that cool my love for Jesus or support idols
7. When I sense any of these things happening, I need to guard my heart!

B. I guard my heart by filling it with God's Word

My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. [21] Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. [22] For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. Proverbs 4:20-22

1. These verses command us to fill our hearts and minds with God's Words of Wisdom!
2. It is not enough to keep out the negative – we must positively fill our hearts with God's Word.
3. Nature abhors a vacuum: I must fill my heart with God's Word so that it can push out the negative!
4. Psalm 119 (a wisdom Psalm) speaks a lot on this!

    How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. [10] With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! [11] I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Ps 119:9-11

    a. If we fill our heart with God's Word, it will help shape our desires so that they are in line with God's will.
    b. This is why we are called to meditate on God's Word day and night - it must soak deep into our subconscious to change not only our thoughts but our desires and dispositions.
5. Regularly reading, hearing, studying, meditating, and memorizing God's Word will serve as an antidote to the poisons the world injects into my heart.

C. Proper external actions will reinforce the effect of God's Word in my heart and life

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1. Notice how guarding the heart flows right into actions

2. These ways not only flow from right desires, but they also reinforce them until the right desires are firmly fixed in our hearts.

3. When right desires begin to flag, we can stoke them back to a white-hot flame by doing the deeds of righteousness!

   But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. [5] Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Revelation 2:4-5

   a. Jesus is critiquing their love (desire) - and the solution is returning to proper actions!

   b. This is not speaking of going through the motions in some lifeless manner, not caring about the state of our heart

   c. The relationship between desire and actions is ultimately symbiotic: proper desires fuel proper actions, and proper actions reinforce proper desires.

IV. Applying the Word

A. Importance of the heart, not just external

1. As we conclude this short series, remember wisdom is not merely technique or even external actions – it is rooted in the fear of the Lord!

   The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. Proverbs 9:10

   a. Wisdom flows from a right recognition and response to God!

   b. Thus, it is never about controlling external actions but about keeping our heart soft towards God!

2. Wisdom actions flow from a wise heart

   Keep your heart with all vigilance,
   for from it flow the springs of life. Proverbs 4:23

   a. To act wisely, we must grow in wisdom from the inside out!

   b. If we do not always remember to read Proverbs this way, we will turn into legalists rather than grace-empowered followers of Jesus.

3. Above all things, with all vigilance, guard and keep your heart in the grace and fear of God!

B. The Spirit empowers us to build a wise life

1. Jesus was anointed with the Spirit – and we must be too!

   There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. [2]And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. [3] And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. Isaiah 11:1-3

   a. The Messiah is the One Anointed with the Spirit – the Spirit of wisdom and fear of the Lord!

   b. If Jesus the Messiah was anointed with the Spirit, how much more are we dependent on the Spirit!

c. We can only walk in wisdom and the fear of the Lord by the Spirit, not by the power of my flesh or by law!

2. God gives us the Spirit to empower us!

   I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. [26] And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. [27] And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. Ezekiel 36:25-27

   a. In justification, God sprinkles and cleanses us!

   b. In regeneration, God gives us a new heart!

   c. In sanctification, God gives us His Spirit to dwell in us and empower us to walk in the way of wisdom, the way of obedience to God's Law.

   d. Even in our sanctification, we are dependent on God's Spirit, God's Work, God's grace!

3. It is by walking in the Spirit that I am able to guard my new heart so that it remains close to Jesus and set against sin and foolishness.

C. The Table and the Spirit

1. The Spirit works in us through the means of grace, especially the Word and the Table.

2. Here we come boldly to receive grace to help us in our need.

3. This is not earned but is freely given to us in Christ!

4. Come and be strengthened by the Spirit!

Building A Wise Life

Proverbs 4:20-27
November 8, 2026
Communion
1 Thessalonians 5:23-24
Teaching keywords: Wisdom and Knowledge; character; Christian life; sanctification

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. [24] The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. 1 Thess. 5:23-24