**Getting to the Heart of Real Change**

**(Proverbs 4:23)**

## Grace Fellowship Church, Pastor Brad Bigney

1. **Your Choices are What Determine Who You Are and Where You End Up**

Basically **v. 1-18** in Proverbs 4are all about choices that every one of us has to make about which path you’re going to step onto.

But **v. 18** has some really good news tucked down into it when it says:

**Proverbs 4:18** “But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.”

What **v. 18** is saying is that we all have to keep making decisions for a lifetime but when the righteous choose to do what God says you’ll find yourself walking with greater light and less confusion, and you can expect it to keep growing for a lifetime.

1. **Your Choices Will Never Change Until You Get a Hold of Your Heart**

**Proverbs 4:23** “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it springs the issues of life.”

*NIV* “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”

*NLT* “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.”

Here’s what your counselees need to understand about this word ‘heart.’ Not just in Proverbs 4:23 but in the rest of the Bible the word ‘heart’ doesn’t mean what it typically means to us in our English language.

When the Bible talks about your ‘heart’ it’s talking about your core beliefs and commitments or motivations as to why you do what you do.

That’s why the word ‘heart’ is used almost 1000x in the Bible because God knows that until your heart changes the direction of your life never changes!

1. **Your Heart is the Control Center for All That’s Going On in Your Life**

It says it’s the wellspring of life because as your heart goes so goes your life.

And that’s why the rest of the chapter talks the way it does in **v. 24-27** because it’s only after you get a hold of your heart in **v. 23** that you can then…

* Work on what you say in **v. 24**
* Take charge of where you place your eyes in **v. 25**
* Think about your behavior and actions in **v. 26-27**

Your counselee will be frustrated and waste a lot of time trying to control their mouth, guard their eyes, or guide their feet if they haven’t first gotten a hold of what’s going on in their heart!

1. **What Your Heart Loves Will Determine Where and How Your Life Goes**

You can trace where you are now back to what you were wanting in your heart.

What your counselee needs to understand is that long before you ever cross over the line into outward, specific sin or foolishness – you first lost an inward battle for the throne of your heart because your heart was already being ruled by desires that were driving you to act, or speak, or think, or choose what you did in that moment. It’s not bizarre!

1. **You Can Love Even Good Things Too Much**

The Puritans called it inordinate desires because there’s nothing wrong with the desire in itself; it’s just that you want it too much. And when that happens you lose all sense of biblical priority so that you end up sacrificing biblically important things on the altar of your idolatrous desires.

* **What about Money?** Money is not evil. So, it’s not sinful to have money or want to have money. But the disordered love of money leads to all kinds of confusion and heartache in your life.

If money stops being a good thing and starts being the ultimate thing for you, because it makes you feel secure or important, then you’re going to make decisions and choose jobs that don’t fulfill you because they don’t match your gifts but they promise more money and so you’ll burn out faster and feel empty sooner than other people, and then wonder what’s wrong.

* **What about Marriage?** Yes, it’s a good thing that God gave us. But if you settle into thinking, “I have to be married or I’ll never have the good life!” then you’ve taken a good thing and turned it into an ultimate thing that you’re building your life around.

If you do that, you’ll either be way too picky, because this person has to be ‘Mr. or Mrs. Right’ that’s going to completely fulfill your life, or you’ll be so desperate that you choose somebody you really shouldn’t.

And if you do get married you’ll be so controlling and demanding because your whole world is now riding on this that you’ll end up crushing that other person, because no human being can bear the weight of all your desires. Marriage was never designed for that. You’re trying to get it to do something it was never designed to do.

* **What about Children?** Are children a blessing? Yes. Are they a good gift? Yes. But what if you build your whole world around your children?

If your sense of joy, well-being, and success are all tied up in your kids so that how they love you and how they live their lives is your whole world you won’t just love them; you’ll worship them because your core beliefs and affections are all built around them now. And it’s disastrous for you and for them!

“Joanna thought she had grown in her faith. The problem was that she had forgotten who she was, and it was not long before her identity in Christ was replaced by another identity. Joanna’s children became her new identity. They gave her meaning and purpose, and they really did give her hope and joy. The problem was that they were not sent by God to do any of that. Joanna lived vicariously through them, and the more she did, the more she became obsessed with their success.

Although Joanna was just as faithful in her personal devotions and public worship, God was no longer at the center of who she was. All it took was her son Jimmy to mess it all up. With all his inner turmoil, Jimmy didn’t make a very good trophy. Being with Jimmy often meant unexpected confrontations and public embarrassment. Her girls were forced to live in the wings of Jimmy’s drama and they didn’t turn out to be trophy children either. Now that they were all adults, Joanna was lost. In their tumultuous launch into adulthood, the kids not only broke Joanna’s heart, but they also robbed her of her identity. She felt like it had all been for naught. When she looked in the mirror, she felt like she didn’t know the person she saw there.” ***Lost in the Middle***, Paul David Tripp, p. 275-276

You can’t love your kids or anybody else like you should if you need them more than you should!

* **What about Work / Achievement?** Work is good, right?

But if your heart shifts into a place where work becomes how you prove yourself, and it’s what you live for because it’s become your identity and ultimate source of security, you’ll be driven to work more hours than you should at the expense of your emotional health, physical health, and spiritual life.

You’ll choose work over relationships and family. And worst of all, you will be lost and devastated when the day arrives – and it’s coming – when you’re no longer viewed as being at the top of your field anymore. Whatever it is.

Chris Evert: “I had no idea who I was, or what I could be away from tennis. I was depressed and afraid because so much of my life had been defined by my being a tennis champion. I was completely lost. Winning made me feel like I was somebody. It was like being hooked   
on a drug. I needed the wins, the applause, in order to have an identity.”   
  
*Good Housekeeping*, October 1990, pp.87-88, quoted in ***Counterfeit Gods***, Timothy Keller, pg.76-77

1. **Your Heart Won’t Let Go of These Other Loves Until It Rests in Something Better**

Really until it rests in Someone better. **Augustine** “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”

That’s why biblical counseling is never just dispensing biblical principles and quoting Bible verses, it’s pointing your counselee to a Savior that is more satisfying than where they’ve been going and what they’ve been doing.

Real change starts in the heart as you begin to sort out and repent of disordered loves.

“Women turn to food when they are not hungry because they *are* hungry for something they can’t name: A connection to what is beyond the concerns of daily life. Something deathless, something sacred. But replacing the hunger for divine connection with Double Stuff Oreos is like giving a glass of sand to a person dying of thirst. It only creates more thirst and more panic.”

Geneen Roth, *Women, Food, and God* (New York: Scribner, 2010), p. 32

If you turn to anything else in this world for what only God can do, it will only create more thirst and more panic in your life.

So, spend more time loving and learning about Jesus than inspecting your own heart because that love for Jesus will be the expulsive power of a new affection that enables you to say ‘no’ to lesser loves that were never designed to rule your heart.

You don’t need to feel overwhelmed thinking you need to be a master analyst to come out of this fog. All you really need is a willingness to pray Psalm 139:23.

**Psalm 139:23** “Search Me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

Very often the only way that God can answer this prayer to help us see our own hearts is through the furnace of adversity. Because most often it’s the heat of adversity that exposes the heart.

"If God told me some time ago that He was about to make me as happy as I could be in this world, and then told me that He should begin by crippling me in all my limbs, and removing me from all my usual sources of enjoyment, I should have thought it a very strange mode of accomplishing His purpose. And yet, how is His wisdom manifest even in this! For if you should see a man shut up in a closed room, idolizing a set of lamps and rejoicing in their light, and you wished to make him truly happy, you would begin by blowing out all his lamps; and then throw open the shutters to let in the light of heaven."   
  
John Piper, A Godward Life, p. 288-289

**John Piper** "O how I pray that when God, in His mercy, begins to blow out my lamps, I will not curse the wind." John Piper, A Godward Life, p. 288-289