

More Than The Vulcan Way Proverbs 3:1-4

Last week I had one of those moments where the nagging feeling that you forgot something sweeps over you like a desert sand storm. You've had the feeling I'm sure where you go out the door, get in the car, head down the road and begin to question things like did I remember to turn off the iron or the burner? Did I remember to pick up the paint pan off the floor so the cat won't walk through it?

A pastor friend once told about getting home after church one Sunday only to realize that they had left their grade school son back at church.

Yeah, I can hear some of you saying that you tried to leave your kids somewhere on purpose but they found their way back home.

My nagging feeling of forgetting something wasn't all that serious, but I do have to say it was gnawing on me. On the way home after church last week Robyn and I were chatting about the message. I always have to get her opinion so I know what not to do or say next week. As we were talking I remembered something from the message that I wanted to say but completely blew through that section on my notes. So we're going to get it today because this is an important truth to get.

If you recall, we were discussing in chapter 2 the ways of a wicked wife who has abandoned her vows before God and her husband to entice someone who is naïve with her seductive words. Now, that may not be a problem for you. So what I wanted to say as well but completely forgot until we were on the way home is that there can be any number of things that can become a mistress.

That thing that sits in your garage may be your mistress. With its sleek lines, smooth ride and sweet sound your car can become an item that may lure you away from God. It can be as enticing and

subtly seductive as any woman. I have a friend who many years ago before he was married, had a sweet looking black T-bird. I don't remember what year it was, but it was something he treasured too much. He lived in an area that had a lot of snow and with a lot of snow comes a lot of what? Salt. *Every night*, and I say that with emphasis, every night after work he would drive home, park his car in his heated garage, and proceed to wash and dry it. Every night.

Then my friend really began to grow in the Lord and eventually moved up to be on staff at Barakel. If you have ever been to Barakel you know immediately one thing when you drive through the gate. As great a place as it is, the roads are all dirt. As a matter of fact you can see evidence of centuries ago how the glaciers moved creating a lot of sand. So when my friend would drive his black T-bird into Camp he would go like two miles an hour to minimize the dust and sand getting all over and in his car. It took him like an hour to drive a mile into the Camp office. The year he moved up there to be on staff he sold it. He realized that it was consuming him, enticing him.

You may have heard the news this week about two events that occurred which show us on one hand how something can consume us that brings about death and another that shows what happens when we allow God to work in us.

The first story is about the death of Whitney Houston. She was just 48. She had reached the pinnacle of her industry. She sang her first solo in church at age 5 and then her first concert at 11. Somewhere along the way, the anchor she grew up on in church became loose and she began to drift. Oh, it is slow and subtle but the drift takes you farther and farther from your moorings. Glamor, success, popularity, fame, fortune, they all played on a very talented music artist. She had troubles at home in her marriage and the stress of the lime light took its toll where she began to abuse alcohol and become addicted to drugs.

The other story is about a Kylie Bisutti, a model who once remarked that she would do whatever it takes to become a model with Victoria Secret. Several months after her marriage, she won that honor at age 20. She too had reached the apex of the industry. It was every girl's dream. In a television interview with George Stephanopolis, she exclaimed that the reason to step down from the lingerie company had to do with her Christian principles. At the age of 21 she indicated that she had grown in the Lord and could no longer honor God or her husband in that particular industry. She felt convicted about honoring her husband and being a good role model for others. She would not allow it to come between her and God.

Anything that takes your heart away from following God can become your mistress.

Your car can be your mistress.

Your bank account can be your mistress.

Your job or promotion can be your mistress.

Your hobby can be your mistress.

Your television can be your mistress.

Your home can be your mistress.

What you read can be your mistress.

You get the point. While Solomon is especially concerned that his son not be seduced by a wayward wife, and it's an issue he brings up again later, we can see that any number of things can take our heart away from loving God; it can take our heart away from pursuing God. It doesn't have to be something that in and of itself is bad. If it draws you away from the Lord and steals your heart, it's sin.

As we discussed last week there are benefits to following the path of wisdom. So as we launch into chapter 3 we see some additional benefits that Solomon offers his son to keep him on the right path. In the first 12 verses there are 6 benefits. The odd verses give the command to follow and the even verses give the benefit. We'll be looking at two of those today in verses 1-4.

As we begin this passage we notice the exhortation to the son to guard his heart. So if you want to follow wisdom the first point is to guard your heart.

I. GUARD YOUR HEART – v. 1

Some scholars get the impression that the son is older and he's about ready to leave home. What we envision in this passage is the father and son sitting down for a long chat. Imagine that the son has his bags packed and he's heading out the door. The son may be going to college or maybe off to the military or perhaps he's getting married or finally moving out of the house for his first job. In these moments before the son embarks out into the world to make his own path in life, the father has some additional words of advice. He begins with a command.

“Don't forget my teaching.” Son, we've spent a lot of time together and I've tried to give you some good counsel about following God on the right way to live so that your life will be full and enjoyable, so there will be less problems – don't forget what I've told you, remember my commands.

One day in a faraway land in a time long ago another father sent his son on an errand. It was a simple task. Your brothers have been away for a while taking care of the family business and I need to know how they're doing. Go to them and bring a report back to me on how what's going on. So off the son went.

As he arrived at the place where they were supposed to be they were gone. He was apparently a little confused because in the story we read that he was wandering around, probably trying to figure out what to do next. Should he keep looking for them or should he go back home and tell his dad they weren't there? Because he was an obedient son he decided the best course of action was to keep looking. Fortunately someone saw him wandering around in the fields and asked what he was doing. The man knew of his brothers and had even

overheard them say they were going to move the business. So off he went to after them.

Before he could get to them they saw him coming and plotted to assassinate the brother. Now at this part of the story we need to interject that they thought he was a self-obsessed little braggart and they hated him. Somewhere along the way they had either forgotten or neglected the teaching of their father. Murder isn't ever right, but that was on their heart to do to this brother, but one brother had a little soft spot and some common sense and encouraged his brothers not to harm him. Instead let's just scare him a bit so he isn't such a nuisance. When the son made it to their camp site, you can imagine quite a scuffle going on as they all grabbed him. With ten to one odds he couldn't get away and was tossed into a deep pit in the middle of nowhere. The oldest was hoping to free him from the anger of the other brothers. They all sat around the camp fire laughing and eating when the sound of some travelers was heard. One brother looked over his shoulder and then at the brothers and said something like "why should we kill this rat, let's get something out of it, how about if we sell him, we'll get some spending money and be rid of him at the same time.

The story, as you know by now, is that of Joseph found in the book of Genesis beginning in chapter 38. His brothers were envious of Joseph. Please keep in mind that before their father was first married, he was a scoundrel. He was as his name indicates a *deceiver*. He swindled his older brother out of his birth right and blessing that rightfully belonged to Esau. Jacob then went to the land of his mother's family. They took him in and he worked for his Uncle Laban. When he got married and the kids came along he was still practicing deception. He was a cheater. Ten of the kids watched and witnessed how he lived. But somewhere along the way God was working in his heart because by the time Joseph was born and he was ready to return to the land of his father, he was

beginning to walk with God more closely. He had changed his deceitful ways. He was teaching Joseph about God and the importance of following him. We see evidence of this when Joseph arrived in Egypt as a slave to a high ranking official.

Let's stop here for a moment and fast forward to Solomon's day. As he is sitting down with his son perhaps on the day this son was getting ready to leave home and strike it out on his own, Solomon wanted him to remember all the commands he had been taught. Maybe he was thinking about this story

Now it wasn't things like don't forget to brush your teeth and wash behind your ears. Or when you do your laundry don't forget to separate the colored clothes from the white clothes. It wasn't anything like that. As we saw in chapter one, the word teaching in Hebrew is the word *torah* and is specifically speaking about the law of God. So what Solomon is telling his son is "don't abandon God's laws, keep them in your heart." Guard your heart.

The heart we know isn't that thing that's pumping in your chest keeping you alive by spreading oxygen and nutrients to every part of your body. Often in Scripture the heart is used figuratively to refer to our entire mental and moral activity. It speaks to our personal life. That it is the figurative place of moral decisions is clearly seen in **Jeremiah 17:9** when he writes that **"the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure."** The NLT ends the verse with a question: **"Who really knows how bad it is."** Solomon wants his son to have a heart that loves and obeys God. **And isn't that what we all want for our children?**

Fast forward to the days of Jesus. One day He is in a discussion with the Pharisees. They were the ones who thought they were religious. It's interesting to note in **Mark 7:5** that they asked Jesus this question: **"Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders..."**

Remember what Solomon said to his son? “Don’t forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart.” Did you notice the difference?

Solomon wanted his son to remember and keep the law of God. The Pharisees wanted them to remember the traditions of man. There’s a big difference between the two. **So are you teaching your children, whatever age they are, the commands of God or the traditions of man?**

The Pharisees were concerned and agitated that the disciples didn’t follow tradition and was their hands before eating. Washing wasn’t for the purpose of good hygiene, they thought the ceremony made them closer to God, that they were more holy. The Pharisees thought that observing certain traditions would make them holy, but Jesus had something different to tell them. Follow with me down the page to vs. 18-23. **“”Don’t you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him clean? For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body”...’He went on to say:’ “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ For from within, out of men’s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’”” (18-23)**

Let me first talk to parents and it doesn’t matter how old your children are. They may be older than me. **What commands, what teaching from God’s law have you given to them to follow, to live by?** Now, how about all of us children, and regardless of our age we are someone’s child. **Can I have a witness? If your parents have given you commands from God to live by, if they have tried to teach godly principles how are you doing? Are you obeying them? Are you following them?**

Sometimes Robyn will ask David to do something. We’re trying to teach him to obey right away. Sometimes he doesn’t respond either with the promptness or with the enthusiasm of someone who

says he loves his mom, so I try to make this a teachable moment. I call him over and pull him close to me and I ask him a simple question. Are you being obedient or disobedient? With down cast eyes and a sorrowful tone he’ll say “disobedient.” Then I ask another simple question: “is that right or wrong.” He’ll respond back in the same sorrowful tone: “wrong.” Then I ask one final simple question: “what should you do?” He says, “do it right away and tell Mom I’m sorry.”

Our response starts in the heart, doesn’t it? It’s bad, it’s wicked, it’s deceitful. But it doesn’t have to be that way. There is hope. It may be true that whatever a man thinks in his heart that is what he is, but we also read in the next chapter that Solomon encourages his son to **“Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” (Proverbs 4:23)**

I like how the message reads: **“Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do.”**

What he’s saying is that it’s going to take work to keep your heart. It means that we consider our heart of high esteem and therefore with constant and careful effort and perseverance we painstakingly guard our heart from what will otherwise entice it, the things that will move us from obeying God’s commands.

If you will remember from our passage last week we learned how important it was to store up or treasure God’s Word. The Psalmist instructs that if we keep God’s Word stored up in the heart for just the right time we won’t sin against Him, we won’t commit those things that Jesus spoke of to the Pharisees. We will instead live godly lives in an immoral world. We’ll be able to say no to the seduction of temptation when it comes. Deposit the commands of God in the store house of your heart so you won’t sin against God.

It is the heart that tells the mind to do or not do, to obey or not obey. The father bids his son as he bids all of us guard your heart.

Verse 2 then gives us the reason to guard the heart.

II. IT WILL GRANT YOU LIFE – v. 2

Proverbs 10:27

Deuteronomy 5:16

Proverbs 12:28

“The path of the godly leads to life. So why fear death?” (The Living Bible)

If God’s Word becomes a habitual practice so that you live godly lives, Solomon suggests two benefits – longevity *of* life and prosperity *in* life.

For those of you classic Trekkie fans what is Spock’s favorite line? **“Live long and prosper.”** And don’t forget the Vulcan salute.

In the time of which Solomon was writing and certainly in the years before this a long life was considered a sign of God’s blessing. Solomon is suggesting that to abide by God’s commands can give long life and prosperity. Now understand that this is a general rule and not an absolute. I can just hear some of you thinking that you don’t seem to be prospering or how come some who seem to be godly die young. As a matter of fact I’m unemployed or I just got hit with a big doctor bill. It seems life is neither long or prosperous.

This principle doesn’t seem to fly with the likes of Joseph or Daniel and his friends or even Paul. They each had some struggles along the way while loving and serving God. We are not told that they had done anything wrong and yet for their obedience they were taken into captivity. As a matter of fact Joseph lived a moral and upright life. His character was above reproach. No one could accuse him of wrong doing. He had a life of integrity and yet he got thrown into the slammer. It doesn’t seem that he’s getting the fair end of the deal when it comes

to what this verse is implying. And what about believers in countries today where poverty is rampant or imprisonment awaits those who live in obedience to God?

Look at these verses:

Proverbs 3:16

Proverbs 4:10

Proverbs 9:10-11

Proverbs 14:27

Proverbs 15:24

When you look around it seems like it’s the godless rather than the godly who are rich and living long lives. I don’t know much about Bill Gates, he seems like a nice enough guy, but I don’t hear evidence that he’s godly. How about Warren Buffet or George Burns? Burns lived to be what 100 or so. Or look at many of the super stars of sports who make millions. They get busted for drugs, arrested for fighting outside night clubs, arraigned on assault and rape charges, yet they seem to have long life and prosperity. **What gives?**

I think we need to understand first that what the verse says is true – to a certain degree. There are certain questionable activities that can shorten one’s life. That leads us to assume that if we eat healthy and exercise and do all the things our doctor tells we might live longer. We can certainly cite cases from Scripture where this principle is true. Look at people like Abraham or Job or even Solomon for that matter, but then there is Paul who could arguably be the godliest man around next to Jesus. He was beaten, imprisoned and often went hungry. Yet those things didn’t keep him from doing what was right, from living a godly life, from following the commands of God. They knew its benefits were better.

Life doesn’t necessarily mean long life in terms of days, but rather has a deeper meaning suggesting abundant life that is in fellowship with God. Added to an abundance or joy that is in the heart for living

an upright and moral life that follows God's commands is a peace within that is satisfying. It is a heart attitude that becomes content no matter what life circumstances may exist, even if physical life is shortened. That's why Job could say that even if God took his life, he would still praise Him. That's why Paul could write that in whatever state he found himself he could be content. Or why he could write that we are to be joyful in all things even though he was sitting in a smelly, filthy jail cell, chained to stocks, after having been beaten.

Or consider Job for a moment. The Bible says **“this man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.” (Job 1:1b)** Here's a guy who had it all together when it came to living godly. As a matter of fact God Himself said **“There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” (Job 1:8b)** Then the bottom fell out on Job. He doesn't know why but He still believes in God. Now there was in that day as there is today what is called the doctrine of retribution. It simply is this and we see it when his friends speak. “Job you must have done something wrong, you must have sinned for God to heap all this trouble on you.” We do the same thing today. Something happens to a friend and we come along side to encourage them and we use the same logic. We wonder to ourselves or out loud, maybe they are involved in some sin and they need to confess. If they were right with God everything would be okay. **But it doesn't work that way does it?** God's ways are not our ways. Sometimes we just have to come to the realization that we just don't know why God is allowing some things to happen to us, because He just flat out isn't going to tell us. He doesn't owe us an explanation, but He does want our obedience, He does want our trust. **In the winter of life can we obey and trust Him that His plans for us are right even if we don't quite understand?**

I believe that's where Joseph was.

*Life is more than making a buck or having your days filled without back aches or buckets to throw up in because you have the flu. Life is about living in the presence of God knowing that no matter what comes our way we can be satisfied with His presence and the knowledge that every day we are striving to become like Him in character is a day that is filled with purpose, it's a day that is filled with life. It's knowing that in the winter of our life when everything seems to be against us we can still rise above it, still give Him praise, still follow Him in obedience because we know that's the way to life, life that begins on the inside. **That, my friend, is what true living is all about.*** You may be given long life and prosperity, but in the end you know those are just added blessings from God. Solomon wants his son to know that no matter how long one lives, there can be inner joy and peace and contentment when we follow the commandments of God. When we obey them we can lay our head down at night on our pillow free of worry that we're going to get caught because we did something illegal or immoral. We can walk with our head held high without fear of having to watch our back. When you guard your heart and keep God's commands you are more likely to avoid the pitfalls that come on a person who does not heed those commands, or who gives in to temptations.

Just keep in mind that the wicked may enjoy their prosperity now in what we call clinical life, because Solomon is clear as is other Scripture that when death comes that's it, they won't take anything with them and eternal punishment awaits them for a life separated from God. And if it's any consolation just keep in mind that your rewards for faithfully following God in this life aren't necessarily tied to this life. Prosperity is more than just what you have in the bank. Prosperity as it is meant here includes wholeness, health and harmony. As a matter of fact sometimes it's translated peace. So keep in mind, there are greater rewards yet to come.

Now verse three gives another command.

III. GARNISH YOUR NECK – v. 3

It's speaking about loyalty to one's covenant. It's speaking about dependability, the Marines would call it *Semper Fi – fidelity or ever faithful*. Again we see the imagery of allowing faithfulness and love to become like a beautiful necklace around us. That we bind them insinuates that it is on tight enough so that it won't come off. We also again are told to indelibly write them on our heart. Put God's Word on our heart with a permanent marker so we never forget. That's the only way to grow in godly character. That we put it on our heart is a love process. By having them written on our heart means that rather than obeying out of duty we obey out of love.

John Phillips writes that “when the mind is engaged, it says ‘I ought to.’ When the will is engaged it says ‘I have to,’ but when the heart is engaged it says ‘I want to.’”

Let's resume our story of Joseph. We left him in jail. He's been there for a few years but his response is the same as that as when he was with Potiphar and we can assume that it's the same as when he was living under the tent of his father Jacob. He's blameless and faithful in all he does, even though life was tossing him lemons, but we see that because of his faithfulness to remember the commands of God taught to him by his father, God rewards him with favor from the jailer.

The same thing happens to Daniel and his friends.

Daniel 1:3-8

Because of their obedience to God, God allowed favor to come on Daniel and his friends in the eyes of the officials. Like Joseph God honored their faithfulness by allowing them to be promoted to positions of prominence while their others who came with them in captivity vanished into obscurity. They are never mentioned again, but not Daniel and his friends. Their names are written in the annals of history because faithfulness garnished their necks.

What then happens to those who never let love or faithfulness leave them, those who garnish their neck as with a beautiful necklace and who write them deep on the tablet of their heart?

IV. IT WILL GIVE YOU A GOOD REPUTATION – v. 4

It doesn't say you'll get earthly rewards, it says you'll have a good reputation. **If I were to visit your school and talk with your teachers or your classmates, what would they say about you, what kind of reputation do you have with them?**
If I were to go to where you work and visit with your peers or to your neighborhood and visit with your neighbors, what would they say about you, what kind of reputation do you have with them?

Reputation is the view someone else holds about you. It is your character – favorable or not. Sometimes we don't care as much about it as we should until we have lost it.

For his faithfulness Joseph was placed as second in command of all Egypt. Only Pharaoh was greater. For their reputation Daniel and his friends were elevated to positions of honor and esteem. Daniel was made ruler of the entire province and given charge over all the wise men of the kingdom of Babylon. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were also elevated to high positions. Daniel's godly reputation carried him into positions of leadership under several different kings and kingdoms.

As Paul stands before Felix he makes the statement in his defense that he strove to keep his conscience clear before God and before man. In other words he maintained a good conscience, he held a good reputation. Later he would write to Timothy that among the qualifications for an elder in the church, he must be blameless or have a good reputation. It doesn't mean to be sinless but rather to have a

character that is above reproach, like Daniel, that you can't be accused of doing wrong.

From the Wisdom and counsel of Solomon we read that **“A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.” (Proverbs 22:1)**

In **Ecclesiastes 7:1** Solomon also writes **“A good name is better than fine perfume...”**

Your reputation is of greater value than all the riches you might possess, it is to be held in such a high estimation that we desire it above anything else of value. True, few people with good reputations fill newspapers. What sells is the dirt and trash of the lives of those whose pursuits have brought scandal and shame. Don't let the glamor and fame fool you, it all too often comes at a high price of losing one's reputation in the process of getting to that position.

One author writes that “riches are useless if in gaining them one ruins his character.”

Keep in mind that is not just your name that either you slander and malign or build up. It is the reputation of those in your family heritage who came before you and those who will follow you. Your reputation speaks for past generations and the generations to come.

There are names by which we are called in the New Testament. Ponder them for a moment. They are brother, believer, saint, and disciple. These are the names by which others consider whether or not the pursuit of following Christ as Savior is of any value to them. What kind of reputation are you showing others? These are the kinds of names we should strive to live up to. Bear in mind that the name given by the people of Antioch to believers living in that city was because of their commitment to follow hard after and live a life that was pleasing to the One who died for their sins. It was there that they were first called Christians: little Christ's. They

had never seen Christ, yet they knew enough about Him by the way those believers lived. They had a different, a good reputation **“in the sight of God and man.”**

Don't forget God's commands. Write them on your heart, live them out in daily life. In so doing you will have a good name among those around you, sought out not because of your wealth or position, but because of your godly reputation. In that way you can then know your life will be both full and filled with peace and contentment.