

GUARDRAILS + + +

| SETH FLICK

Have you ever taken your family on a walk and it didn't quite go as you planned for it to be? I mean, like one of those times where you were cooped up for a really long amount of time because of rain or whatever, and it was kind of dicey, but you're like, for the love of all things holy, we need to take our family outside of these doors.

Well, like Melinda and I, we love to hike. I would say my family loves to hike, but that would be a lie, and I can't lie in front of you. We love to hike, and we drag our children along with us. And I have one specific story of a specific hike that is like lore in our family. It's referred to often.

And it was this one day in Wisconsin where we wanted to take the whole family out to this beautiful nature preserve. So we did get out there. Yes, it was dicey, like the day before, and most of the days before that. But we started on a nice wooden walkway, and it was beautiful. Just walking along, looking at flowers and leaves and all the things that you look at in God's creation. It was beautiful. On this little flick family foray, I love alliteration.

And then we got to an area where we could split off, or we could stay on this wooden boardwalk. And me, love adventure. I was like, hey, everybody, you know what would be a great idea? Going off of this nice dry path. Look at how beautiful it looks over there. So we did that.

And we started to walk into this area. And at first, it was fine. And then you started to hear this sound every time that you would take another step. And then the cuffs of the boy's pants got all full of mud. And I started to slip like some crazy cartoon character on a banana peel. And you are actually going to see the actual footage of this actual hike, because it was hilarious.

And as we're walking through all of this mud and all of this muck, I'm trying to like pick up one kid and walk around. Other kids are losing their shoes. And then walking around with their socks, which meant they just went straight to the garbage when we got done.

But as we got finished with that, I was thinking, oh, here we go. Look at it. Isn't that wonderful? Not too bad right there. But then, just wait a second. Wait a second. Lost shoe in three, two, one. There it goes. Sock in the mud. That's the beginning of the walk. And then he just kept on going. All right. So that was funny. It was a moment of levity.

Now I want you to think about that in the way that you make decisions in your life. You look back on it and you're like, how did I get here? This isn't wise at all. What series of events led me to this place? Like it's a surprise. When we know full well, we weren't listening to God's word. We were not employing his word in a way that was wise. And we're not understanding what he has to say about our lives.

And again, we wonder why we're knee deep making the sounds through life. It's because we're not reading his word. We're not listening to him. So maybe it would be good for us to go through like time in the word where we're learning from his word to desire his word so that we can actually apply it in our lives. Because living the will of God takes wisdom.

And I want you to think about the will of God in a new way. Most often we think of the will of God as this like weird scavenger hunt where we've kind of got to try to figure out left and right. And once we do, we kind of give up when we think that we're off of it.

Getting to Jesus is a narrow path from the scriptures. But after that, it opens up into this beautiful playground that is his will. And there's a bunch of things in the playground. This is like God's backyard, the father's backyard. He wants you to play in his creation.

Like you go to a playground and there is a slide. And if you grew up in the eighties, you burnt your legs because it was all made of metal and there was no coverage and it was hot sun and you burnt everything. Or there was a teeter-totter. And I wouldn't do this in the playground of God, but you'd wait until you were on the bottom and your buddy was on the top. Then you ditch and bail and he'd go flying. That was fun back in the eighties and the nineties. That's a playground right there.

The will of God is far more like an open playground with a lot of God-pleasing options within it rather than a narrow scavenger hunt that you have no idea if you've gone to the left or to the right and totally messed it up. God's law is pretty clear in some ways. It's like the fence around the playground if you want to think about it that way.

There's a lot of thou shalt nots. That's where you don't go outside of the fences. There's a bunch of thou shalls. That's what you get to do inside. And I want you to notice when you read the scriptures, the thou shalt nots are usually quite specific. The thou shalls are usually a lot more ambiguous.

Why? Because our God is so wise and so kind that he desires you to play in his backyard playground and to enjoy his creation. And this gives us a totally different view of God's law and God's will. Because most times when we hear about what we shouldn't do, we think about them as like, that's really going to harsh my buzz. Isn't life better on the other side of the fence?

Brothers and sisters, you've been on the other side of the fence. You know that it's not better for you long term. Guardrails don't limit your freedom. They keep you from crashing over the cliff, walking through the mud and the muck and the mire and wondering how in the world did I just get here? And that's what our series that starts today called Guardrails is going to be all about.

What is it that should be let into the playground of our father? How much of it should be let in here? And how much of it should we keep on the outside of the fence? Because there's a lot that you could like bring in and it could be neutral technology in and of itself neutral. But how much should you bring inside the fence? How much should you exercise godly wisdom and leave it outside politics?

There is godliness in the way that we speak with each other and the way we interrelate as cities and communities. How much of that should we draw into the playground of God and how much causes so much rage that we need to keep it outside the fence? AI, our hobbies, entertainment, all of these are

topics we're going to talk about of how much should be brought into the playground and perhaps how much should be left outside.

So this week we're going to look at the guardrail of entertainment. And we're going to leave social media to the side. Zach's going to talk about that next week. I'm just talking about podcasts, playlists, what you watch on TV, what shows you binge and stream.

That's going to shape your worldview. That's going to be a word coming into your ear, into your heart, and maybe affecting where you're at in the playground. Because really what we want to figure out from God's word is what is defining the guardrails of your heart.

Now, I love getting deep into a specific scripture and I want wisdom from the father to help me in my life. But I believe that based off of all the asking for a friend text, there were a lot of them that were asking for wisdom to be applied in life. There was a lot of them that had to do with listening to God, or maybe I can't hear God.

So let's open up God's word from a father to his sons. Let's open up Proverbs chapter four. We're going to look at almost the whole chapter. So if you've got your physical Bible with you, please open that thing up. Please bring it next week, all throughout the guardrails series. You can open up your phone, go to Proverbs chapter four.

Proverbs is part of a specific genre or kind of literature called the wisdom literature. So if you're looking to hear God's voice and how to apply it to your life, this is the book for you. In fact, Proverbs four is a proverb of Solomon, a father to his sons, so that they have the best concept of living God's word and his will in their life.

So you and I get to read portions of this. You get the yellow portions. I'll read the white portions. At Fremont, at Northwest, I want you guys to say really loudly those yellow words. We're going to hear them all throughout the message today.

It begins this way: Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction. Pay attention to gain understanding. I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching. He's saying, look, sons, I know you're going to want to be wise.

Think about Solomon. The scriptures say he was the wisest man who has ever lived on the earth. This is a voice you're going to want to listen to. And because it's in the scriptures, the Holy Spirit is now speaking the father's words through a father Solomon directly to you. So let's figure out what those words mean.

Instruction and understanding. The first word, instruction. It's discipline. It's moral teaching. These are like the words on the page of the scriptures, the words that you hear as you listen to the word of God being spoken to you. That's the instruction that Solomon is speaking of. That's the instruction for you and for me. So if we want to live wise lives, we've got to be in the word to receive his instruction.

The next word is understanding. That's the act of discernment. That's application. That's what life looks like inside the playground of the father.

But how do you make it from like instruction, the words on the page to applying it appropriately? Well, that's why we got to go into the next section of this verse. Proverbs 4 verses 5 through 7.

And actually you're going to read on campuses and here at this campus, the second word in this reading and all the rest of the yellow words, because they're all the same. Get wisdom. Get understanding. Instruction, wisdom, understanding. Do not forget my words or turn away from them. Don't forsake wisdom. She will protect you. Love her. She'll watch over you.

The beginning of wisdom is this. Get that wisdom. Get wisdom. Though it costs all you have, get understanding. Wisdom is the key piece that gets us from instruction words on the page to understanding actually applying it in our lives.

That word wisdom, it's a lot of fun to say in Hebrew. So we're going to learn to say it at all of our campus today. You got to go from the back of your throat with this one. I'm not going to say spit on your neighbor, but it's probably going to happen. Sorry guys in the front. They got a little bit of a spray there. Say it again. Yeah, that's a lot of fun to say.

It takes some work, some understanding. It's wisdom. Again the key linchpin in moving from instruction to understanding.

Wisdom is that skill. Wisdom is the ability to look at the situations of your life and say, this is what I know of life in the father, and this is how my life situation is going right now. And here is how I will apply to this to have understanding and enjoy the best path, the most fun with the father.

Now look, he's going to give Solomon what it's going to look like as we move out of the backyard, outside of the fences, as we continue to look more in what it looks like.

Do not exercise chachma. He says, do not enter the paths of the wicked. Don't walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it. Do not go on it. Turn away from it. Pass over it.

The way of the wicked, it's like a deep darkness. They do not know over what they stumble.

It's kind of like, this is what I see in most counseling situations as a pastor. People come in and they're like, I don't know how I cheated on my wife. Like I was reading the Bible and it said I could like not hold hands with another woman. So I got closer to the fence and I shouldn't, you know, like devote portions of my heart to this other woman.

So I got closer to the fence because God said talking to someone's okay, but I haven't gone over the fence yet. But actually, why in the world? Why in the world is our goal to get as close to the line as possible?

And then we are confused as to why we find ourselves on the other side of it, right?

This is the majority of counseling situations that we take in for pastors. We can see how you got to that place. We can make an estimation as to how many questions you asked yourself to justify your actions to try to push that fence boundary further and further. But we know that there are instructions in the

Lord's word that you clearly bypassed, not exercising wisdom. And now we know why you don't understand why you're out here.

And you want to know how I can diagnose that so well? I find myself right here often.

Now, my example, it's going to be a little bit humorous, but it works nonetheless. You know that I love to run, I've brought it up in previous sermons before. And I love to listen to music, I listen to podcasts.

But being that I did grow up in the 80s and 90s, my favorite music to listen to for like beats per minute, plus it just like resonates with my heart for some reason, is 80s and 90s rap.

I know, you're looking at this face and you're like, that totally makes sense. Thanks for laughing, Fremont and Northwest. But that's what I grew up on.

So now picture this, all of this running around Bennington, Nebraska, like three miles into a run and I'm just like, murder, murder was the case that they gave me.

What of this has experience with murder, other than just absolutely killing a Snoop song right now?

Or like, I'm just like strolling, really moving, and I'm like rolling down the street, smoking endos, sipping on gin and juice, laid back.

And I go through that and I'm like, am I really, are these the words coming out of my mouth right now? I'm way over on this side of the fence.

There was nothing of my life that has anything to do with smoking weed, drinking too much, and having my mind on my money and my money on my mind.

I didn't really think much, right, around God's instruction, around exercising his wisdom and what was coming into my ears and out of my mouth and my heart.

I definitely would not want my sons to think that's my wisdom and how I treat the life that God has given me.

And then when I think about all the other words from those songs that I know, how they look at women and denigrate them, and how terrible would I feel if my sons heard words like that come out of my mouth and thought that that's how I viewed their mother or every other woman that I respect.

And then I wonder why, maybe I'm out here. Maybe I've led my family out here. Maybe I haven't listened to instruction. Maybe I haven't been wise, and that's why I don't have understanding.

And so the writer of the Proverbs, Solomon, keeps teaching his sons and keeps teaching us something that we can all participate in with God's word from Proverbs 4, verse 23.

Above all else, guard your heart for everything you do flows from it.

It's an interesting principle at play. You might think this is just Old Testament wisdom. It's not. Jesus teaches the other side of this principle.

In Matthew chapter 15, he says, from out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

Basically, the psalmist is saying, guard your heart from what comes into it. And Jesus is saying, because what comes into your heart, guess what? Comes out of your heart.

What goes into your life comes out in your life. What comes into the playground is going to move you out of the playground.

So maybe it's time to start thinking more and more about getting into the word more and more rather than what we spend our time in.

Now as we're talking about entertainment and we're talking about like the shows we binge or just what we watch on TV, do you know how much time we spend on television?

Do you know the Nielsen's rating system? Americans spend on average about 950 hours a year watching TV. That's almost 40 full days of your year. You're watching TV.

And what about like podcasts? That's something else that we like bring in, right? The average American spends another 118 hours per year on podcasts.

How much of that do you think discernment is exercised in?

Like what's the show that you're going to watch hours and hours and hours into? Is it going to be something that's going to build your family up? Is it going to draw you closer to Jesus? If so, great. Keep it in the playground. That's wonderful.

But you can't tell me that 40 hours worth of your programming all fits in the playground.

What goes into your heart that we should guard is going to make its way out. And it's going to move you and your heart closer to the fence. Move further and further to the edges of the playground until one day you find yourself from the outside looking in, asking why, how, where, how does this happen? How did I move myself outside of God's will? Why does my life look like this?

Now here's what I don't want you to do. I don't want you to hear this teaching of the word and just like relegate it to somebody else to move it backwards towards, I don't know, Solomon and his kids and just keep it there.

I'm going to bring to you a biblical story that actually intersects with today's day for the most part so that you know that when it comes to God's instruction, we're not guarding our hearts. We're not really listening to him.

All right.

So there's this wonderful story in Matthew chapter 17 about Peter, James, and John experiencing Jesus in a fullness they've never experienced before.

They go up onto what's considered Mount Tabor and they see Jesus in his glory.

And all of a sudden two other characters appear next to Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

They've been gone for ages and now they're there next to Jesus.

And it says that Jesus is teaching them. He's instructing them about an exodus that he was about to leave.

The heavens open up. The father speaks to Peter, James, and John. And the father says, this one, not the other two, this one is my son whom I love. With him, I am well pleased.

What are those last three words campuses? Listen to him. Listen to him.

And Peter is like, oh yeah, I'll absolutely do that. I'm going to build a tabernacle tent, a place of worship, one for you, Jesus. And that'll be great.

But then he adds, and one for Moses and one for Elijah.

And Jesus says, no, you need to go back down that mountain and tell people about me.

Now that was 2000 years ago.

I went to Mount Tabor. I went to the place that is identified as the transfiguration where the father says, listen to my son, Jesus.

And I went into this beautiful cathedral and I could look around and there were paintings and murals focused on this story, focusing on Jesus.

It was a wonderful place of worship.

But as I look up, I see off to the left a door and much like I was adventurous in the first story, I was adventurous in this story and the door said entrance.

So I just walked outside of the main Jesus fearing sanctuary through this door and I expected to see something amazing.

And I looked up and there was a giant mural, not focusing on Jesus who I'm supposed to listen to, but focusing on Elijah.

That's not his son. We're not supposed to listen to him. We're only supposed to worship Jesus.

We're not supposed to build a tabernacle worship space.

And yet what do modern day people do?

We don't listen to the father.

And so I was like, blah, this is terrible. I'm going to move out of this idolatrous area.

I'm going to go back into the beautiful sanctuary and I kind of like cleansed my palate with Jesus and there he was.

But then out of my right eye, I saw another door and I was like, there's no way we as humans screwed it up this bad.

So I went through the door expecting something better.

And as I look up, I see this beautiful mural, but it's of Moses.

This is my son in whom I am well pleased. I love him. Listen to him.

And the him is Jesus who says, don't build those other tabernacles to anybody else.

And what did we do? We didn't listen to him.

And I kind of think that's where we're at right now.

We're not engaging in the word because we're too busy binging.

We don't get the instruction, therefore we can't apply wisdom.

And so we have no understanding.

And I want you to think about Jesus, like he was the one who went outside of the playground and saw us as dirty and nasty as we are.

And his feet get dirty and messy as he comes into our mess.

He walks a path, like we talked about paths at the beginning.

He walks a path.

That path is called the Via Dolorosa.

You can follow it even to this day.

You can go and walk it.

I did.

There's cobblestones and therefore there is dirt and mud everywhere.

If there's just a little bit of a rain.

Just think about those muddy feet as he walked up a hill to find you and me where we didn't listen to him.

We didn't guard our hearts and therefore what we allowed in also came out.

And he came into that mud and rather than it making him dirtier, he made it holy.

There's a story from John chapter nine about a blind man and mud.

Jesus saw that he couldn't see.

He couldn't see the path.

He couldn't see the way.

So what does Jesus do?

Takes some spit, some mud, some dirt.

He makes mud.

He puts it over the eyes of this blind man.

And after this mud is removed, guess what?

This guy can see.

He can see the path.

He can see Jesus.

He can see a full life ahead of him in his grace because Jesus is willing to get muddy and messy just for you and for me to bring us back into the great playground of the father.

So maybe it's time that we listen to him.

All right, I want to encourage you to take one step of application here.

You're going to see a QR code come up.

I would love for you to have more interaction with his instruction.

This is a 31 day Bible reading plan.

One proverb every day, one word of wisdom every day of God's instruction for your life.

There's going to be a devotion that's going to be connected to that every day so that you can hear the word of God.

You can be wise in salvation to have better understanding.

That QR code is going to take you to the app and within the app, you can find the Proverbs reading plan that's going to go live a little bit later today.

So that's how you can have better instruction and spend better time.

Not the 40 days binging Netflix, but maybe just maybe a little bit more time under the instruction of the father so that you can have wisdom.

And I want to give you something practical.

From years of pastoral experience, years of time in the word, four concepts using the word wise and an acronym that you can apply that instruction that you've learned.

The first is a W it's word aligned.

When you come up to a specific area of your life, don't just allow everything to come in.

No guard your heart.

Ask yourself, is this word aligned from the instruction? I know.

Does this line up with Jesus? Does the media that I bring into my heart line up with his word?

Does what I want to do mean that I have intentional guarding of my heart?

Do I have boundaries that make sure that I'm not just leaping over the fence with reckless abandon in the mud and the muck, but am I protecting my eyes and my mind and my ears and therefore the heart that Jesus has redeemed.

So that's W.

That's I.

Now S is it edifying my soul?

That is, am I just wasting time here or am I experiencing more joy because of whatever this is more peace in my life, more reconciliation, greater depths of faith, that soul edifying that is purpose and meaning in life.

And those are your first three steps to live in wise.

And finally, E is it eternity focused?

Am I just frittering away my time because I don't think my minutes matter?

Am I going to find myself in the mud again?

Or is Jesus going to do some stronghold breaking today in his word?

And I can look to eternity back on this decision and say, that was a God pleasing wise moment where the spirit was working strong in my heart.

If so, we can move back to Proverbs 4 23 and read it all again together across campuses.

Above all else, guard your heart for everything you do flows from everything.

The songs you sing, the spouse you choose, the job you have, all of those are in the playground of the father.

He's not some old man sitting on a porch waiting for you to mess up.

He's your dad.

He loves to see you enjoy the creation that he made for you and I to enjoy.

So today, even if it was a little bit rainy a little bit earlier, please go and please go in peace.

Please read God's words of instruction.

Be wise in your salvation of what you leave into your heart and have a bunch of understanding as you have a beautiful day in the amazing backyard playground of the Lord.

Amen.

All right.

Now I'd ask you to please stand and we'll pray.

Jesus, thank you for this moment that you've brought into our lives and into our hearts.

Thank you for your teaching.

We would ask that your words of instruction, well that we would have a thirst for that and a hunger for that so that we can see wisdom applied in our lives in a way that has great understanding so that when others look at the life we get to lead, they'll see you, they'll see joy, they'll see peace as we enjoy your playground and your will.

Lord, we ask this with all your wisdom in your name we pray.