

"GUARD YOUR HEART" SERIES

#1: "Guard Your Heart"

INTRO:

Proverbs 4:23 in the NIV is the theme verse for this series:

"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." The ESV has it: ***"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."***

The Hebrew translated "**heart**" here (lev) is a word that might be translated "mind" or "intellect." It's used almost exclusively of human beings in the Old Testament. *As the Hebrews used the word, it was something animals didn't have.* It occurs 858 times in the Old Testament. The *Contemporary English Version* of the Bible translates this verse: ***"Carefully guard your thoughts because they are the source of true life."*** *Today's English Version* has it: ***"Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts."*** *The Living Bible* has it: ***"Above all else, guard your affections. For they influence everything else in your life."*** To the ancient Hebrews the heart was the mind, including all thoughts and emotions. They saw the heart as the seat of emotion, but unlike us, *they also saw the heart as the seat of thought, whereas we see the brain as the seat of thought.* When they used the word we translate "**heart**," they were never referring to the blood pump in the chest cavity.

However, studies of people who have undergone open heart surgeries have revealed personality changes in many. One explanation for such changes is that as the patient's blood is circulated through a machine while surgery is being done on the heart, it is contaminated to an extent, affecting the brain, thus causing behavioral changes. Another theory is that the heart actually is involved in a person's emotional makeup.

Studies of heart transplant recipients has revealed personality changes that match the personalities of the donor! How this all works, we don't really understand, but it seems to be in line with the belief of the ancient Hebrews, who believed what God told them, that ***"the life of the flesh is in the blood"*** (Leviticus 17:11).

While I understand that the biblical "heart" is not necessarily the organ in the upper left side of our chests, I must say that I like the

expression "***guard your heart.***" It fits with even today's usage. We say, "He's got heart," or "He's got such a good heart," or "She gave him her heart." They say that here in the South, we can say whatever we want to someone, as long as we add "Bless your heart!" So, I'll be using it throughout this series, and by it I'll be referring to "the seat of and the function of reason, including everything we ascribe to the brain: power of perception, reason, understanding, insight, consciousness, memory, knowledge, reflection, judgment, and discernment."

This morning I want us to consider the question: Why would God tell us, "***Above all else, guard your heart***"?

First of all, God wants you to "***guard your heart***"

...BECAUSE YOUR HEART IS THE MOST VALUABLE THING YOU HAVE.

Solomon says, "***Above all else, guard your heart...***" In other words, make guarding your heart your number one priority!

We don't guard worthless things. How many of you put out your garbage and then stand guard on it until the truck comes? Why? Because it's garbage! It's not worth anything!

Your heart is the most precious thing you have! Your heart is "***the wellspring of life***" and that from which "***flow the springs of life.***"

What is Solomon saying here? What is "***the wellspring of life***"? Well, what's a "wellspring"? A "wellspring" is a water source that keeps a well filled. As it is used here, in a figurative sense, it's referring to that part of us from which our very being comes – the spring, the source of everything we think, everything we are, everything we do.

In his famous Mother's Day sermon, "Keepers of the Springs," Peter Marshall tells this story:

"Once upon a time, a certain town grew up at the foot of a mountain range. It was sheltered in the lee of the protecting heights, so that the wind that shuttered at the doors and flung handfuls of sleet against the windowpanes was a wind whose fury was spent. High up in the hills, a strange and quiet forest dweller took it upon himself to

be the Keeper of the Springs. He patrolled the hills and wherever he found a spring, he cleaned its brown pool of silt and fallen leaves, of mud and mold and took away from the spring all foreign matter, so that the water which bubbled up through the sand ran down clean and cold and pure.

"It leaped sparkling over rocks and dropped joyously in crystal cascades until, swollen by other streams, it became a river of life to the busy town. Millwheels were whirled by its rush. Gardens were refreshed by its waters. Fountains threw it like diamonds into the air. Swans sailed on its limpid surface and children laughed as they played on its banks in the sunshine.

"But the city Council was a group of hard-headed, hard-boiled businessmen. They scanned the civic budget and found in it the salary of a Keeper of the Springs. Said the Keeper of the Purse: 'Why should we pay this romance ranger? We never see him; he is not necessary to our town's work life. If we build a reservoir just above the town, we can dispense with his services and save his salary.' Therefore, the City Council voted to dispense with the unnecessary cost of a Keeper of the Springs, and to build a cement reservoir.

"So, the Keeper of the Springs no longer visited the brown pools but watched from the heights while they built the reservoir. When it was finished, it soon filled with water, to be sure, but the water did not seem the same. It did not seem to be as clean, and a green scum soon befouled its stagnant surface. There were constant troubles with the delicate machinery at the mills, for it was often clogged with slime, and the swans found another home above the town. At last, an epidemic raged, and the clammy, yellow fingers of sickness reached into every home in every street and lane.

"The City Council met again. Sorrowfully, it faced the city's plight, and frankly it acknowledged the mistake of the dismissal of the Keeper of the Springs. They sought him out in his hermit hut high in the hills and begged him to return to his former joyous labor. Gladly he agreed and began once more to make his rounds. It was not long before pure water came lilting down under tunnels of ferns and mosses and to sparkle in the cleansed reservoir. Millwheels turned again as of old. Stenches disappeared. Sickness waned and convalescent children playing in the sun laughed again because the swans had come back.

"Do not think me fanciful, too imaginative, or too extravagant in my language when I tell of the Keepers of the Springs. The phrase, while poetic, is true and descriptive. We feel its warmth, its softening influence, and however forgetful we have been, how much we have taken for granted life's precious gifts, we are conscious of wistful memories that surge out of the past..."

To "**guard your heart**" is to be a "Keeper of the Springs." If the heart is plugged up, the flow of the good things of life is stopped. If the heart is poisoned or contaminated, what flows out of it is toxic. If the heart is weakened, life is less than what it should be. Jesus said in Matthew 15:18-19, "**But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.**"

So, Satan, the god of this world, targets our hearts. He uses those who serve him in this world to attack our hearts. He wants to "plug up" our "**wellspring of life.**" He wants to pollute it and destroy the good in us. He wants to weaken it so that we do not become "**the salt of the earth**" and "**the light of the world**" (Matthew 5:13-14). We must guard our hearts against Satan's attacks so that none of this can happen.

Second, God tells us "**Guard your heart**"

...BECAUSE HE WANTS IT.

God wants your heart. It is the part of you that carries His image. It is the part of you that either loves God and obeys Him or hates God and disobeys Him. It is the part of all of us that was contaminated and separated from God by the sin of father Adam and mother Eve. It is the part of us that is the basis of our relationship with God. In Romans 10:10 Paul wrote: "**For with the heart one believes and is justified...**"

Someone has said, "There are some things that you should give to no one but God." The heart is one of them. Many have given their hearts to people, to careers, and to certain ideals, and we should certainly be committed to each other, to our chosen careers or ways of life, and to our ideals, *but we should always reserve the deepest and innermost parts of our hearts for God and God alone.* Jesus said in Matthew 22:37, "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**"

It's with our hearts that the process of being saved begins. When we through faith give our hearts to God, our fellowship with Him, our peace with Him, is restored. Our sin no longer separates us from Him, and the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us. Paul wrote in Philippians 4:7, "**...the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ**

Jesus.” It is through our faith in Christ and our commitment to Him that we can, through the power of the Holy Spirit, guard our hearts.

In Romans 12:2 Paul wrote: **“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...”** In other words, we need to learn to think not as the world thinks, but as God thinks. And how can we do that? By reading and studying what God has said in His Word.

Third, God wants you to **“guard your heart”**

...BECAUSE SATAN WANTS IT!

Peter wrote in 1st Peter 5:8, **“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”** Is he saying that the devil wants to kill you? Not exactly. *The devil wants to destroy your faith.* Jesus gives us some insight here in Matthew 10:28, where He says: **“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”** The devil knows that if he can **“devour”** us or “kill” our faith, God cannot save our souls.

One writer says, “When Solomon says to guard your heart, he implies that you are living in a combat zone – one in which there are casualties.”

We are living in a society that has exposed our spiritual immaturity and driven us to anxiety, depression, and disappointment to the extent that we have, in many cases, allowed Satan to, if not capture our hearts, cause us to be incapable of giving God our whole heart. Satan is satisfied with this because he knows that if we are not *for* God, we are *against* Him.

Jesus told His disciples in John 14:1, **“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.”** Troubled hearts are open doors for Satan. Troubled hearts are susceptible. The remedy for a troubled heart is trust in God and in the Lord Jesus.

Notice what Solomon says after he says, **“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”** In verses 24-27 he says: **“Put away from you crooked speech; and put devious talk far from you. Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. Ponder the path of your feet, then**

all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or the left; turn your foot away from evil."

Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 12:34? He said, "***For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.***" Perverse and corrupt words and ideas are indicative of a heart that isn't right with God.

He said in Luke 6:45, "***The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.***" When our actions are not good, it is because our hearts are not right with the Lord.

I repeat: Satan, the god of this world, wants your heart. You are living in a world that will try to destroy your faith and expose your heart to all kinds of danger. Hear Paul's words in Philippians 4:4-9:

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

CONCLUSION:

Back in 2011, I went through thirteen weeks of cardiac rehab. Three days a week I drove to National Park Medical Center, had my blood pressure and blood sugar checked, and spent an hour on exercise equipment designed to strengthen my heart. My doctor pointed out that, while the program would benefit me, if I didn't keep exercising after the thirteen-week program was over, my heart would be susceptible again.

My *spiritual* heart needs regular exercise, too. I need to spend time in prayer, Bible study, worship, fellowship, being good, and doing good. So do you.