



Guarding the Heart

Key idea:

The key to godly character and a life blessed by God is carefully guarding our hearts because the state of the heart determines actions and character.

Key text:

Proverbs 4:20–27

My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. ²¹ Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; ²² for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body. ²³ Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. ²⁴ Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. ²⁵ Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. ²⁶ Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. ²⁷ Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.

Key points:

1. Scripture teaches that we must guard our hearts carefully because the state of the heart will determine our actions and character (Proverbs 4:23; 23:19).
2. The heart is like a spring: everything else in my life flows from it (Proverbs 4:23-27; Exodus 20:17; Matthew 12:33-35; Mark 7:20-23).
3. There are no simple steps to seeing my character changed, for my actions and character flow from my heart. Consequently, I must guard and shepherd my heart if I wish to become wise and walk the path of wisdom.
4. Three key ways I guard my heart are:
 - a. Filling it with God's Word (Proverbs 4:20-22; Proverbs 2:10-12; Colossians 3:16-17; Psalm 17:4; Psalm 119:9-11)
 - b. Choosing my companions carefully (Proverbs 4:20; Psalm 1:1; Psalm 26:4-5; Proverbs 13:20; Proverbs 23:19-21; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Colossians 3:16)
 - c. Reinforcing godly desires with godly actions (Proverbs 4:23-27; Joshua 1:8; Proverbs 2:10-12, 20; Proverbs 22:5; Matthew 7:24-27; 2 Peter 1:3-10; Revelation 2:4-5)

5. The Gospel provides all the resources I need to experience real change in both my desires and actions (Ezekiel 36:25-27; Romans 8:3-4; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Hebrews 8:6-13).

Questions for discussion/application:

1. What part of Sunday's text and teaching stood out most to me? Why?
2. How tempted am I by "quick-fix" schemes that promise results without lasting change in my desires and behaviors?
3. When I think about guarding my heart do I tend to focus more on trying to keep things out by restricting activities, or do I tend to focus more on filling my heart with good things? Why do I tend to place my focus there?
4. When confronted with sin in my life, do I tend to think that my sinful actions are a reflection of the state of my heart, or do I tend to think they are an aberration and not a reflection of my "true self"? What does Scripture teach on this topic?
5. Why is it necessary for me to meditate on God's Word "day and night" for it to transform my heart? How much effect will it have without consistent, sustained meditation?
6. Why do companions have such an effect on my character and actions? How do other people help to shape my heart and soul, my desires and actions?
7. Bret said, "The relationship between desire and actions is ultimately symbiotic: proper desires fuel proper actions, and proper actions reinforce proper desires." Can actions really help shape my desires? Can I think of examples where actions changed my desires over time?
8. Why is it important to understand all that happens when I become a child of God by the Gospel? Why is this essential for seeing my desires and actions becoming more like Christ?
9. Whom can I pray for, share what I have learned, and invite to church this week?

Preview of next week: God's Polygraph: The Word of God (Hebrews 4:12-13)