

Theme: 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.

I. Intro - A Poisoned Well

- A. June 2015 - over 500 people get sick at zipline tour in Gatlinburg TN
- B. Eventually discovered it was from water in coolers along the course
- C. All the coolers got water from the same well
- D. Today: the well from which all character flows - the heart

II. The Importance of Guarding the Heart

- A. A very important truth

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. Proverbs 4:20–23

- 1. Pay attention; listen closely; etc - this is important!
- 2. Speaks of very actively paying attention, listening, tracking this down

- B. The importance of guarding the heart

²³ Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Proverbs 4:23

- 1. This is the key instruction - guard your heart
- 2. Above all - "more than all guarding, guard your heart" - this is the treasure that must be protected and carefully watched over and tested for health.

- 3. Like a guard at the gates, be very careful what you let into and out of your heart.
- 4. This is a call to carefully consider the state of our heart and to do what is necessary to cultivate proper desires within our heart and to weed out improper desires.
Listen, my son, and be wise, and keep your heart on the right path. Proverbs 23:19

- C. The reason: the heart is the spring from which life flows
Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Proverbs 4:23

- 1. The wellspring is that from which all else flows
- 2. Different translations get the idea
 - a. NIV2011 - everything you do flows from it
 - b. CSB - it is the source of life
 - c. NLT - it determines the course of your life
- 3. Biblically, the heart is the seat of our thoughts, emotions, desires, and will. Because the heart is where we think, desire, and decide, it is the source of our actions.
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. Pr. 4:23–27
 - a. Note that the proverb moves from heart to actions, giving a catalog of body parts, and ending with avoiding evil.

b. Jesus taught the same thing

He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' ²¹ For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'" Mark 7:20–23

4. This means there are no simple steps to seeing our character changed, for our actions and character flow from our heart. Consequently, we must guard and shepherd our hearts if we wish to become wise and walk the path of wisdom.

III. LifeHack: Guarding Our Heart

A. Guard your heart by filling it with God's Word

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. Prov 4:20–22

1. This is the preceding command to guarding our heart in v23
2. We often think of guarding the heart in terms of not allowing bad things in, but this is only part of the process, and it is not the main one here.
3. This is because the idea of "guard" is not to keep out evil, but to watch over, protect
4. The biblical advice would be to positively fill your heart with God's Word so that it is full and there is no room for evil to grow.

How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. ¹⁰ I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. ¹¹ I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Psalm 119:9–11

a. If we fill our heart with God's Word it will help shape our desires so that they are in line with God's will.

b. This is why we are called to meditate on God's Word day and night - it must soak deep into our subconscious to change not only our thoughts but our desires and dispositions.

B. Guard your heart by choosing your companions carefully

My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Proverbs 4:20

Listen, my son, and be wise, and keep your heart on the right path. ²⁰ Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, ²¹ for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags. Proverbs 23:19–21

1. Proverbs assumes we choose to be with our parents (or teachers) and listen to them!
2. Keep your heart on the right path - by not hanging with fools!
3. We need to be around those who will speak God's Word to us, and who will encourage us in wisdom and right desires rather than foolishness and evil desires.
4. I taught on this as part of the series - look there for more info on this topic.

C. Guard your heart by reinforcing godly desires with proper actions

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. Proverbs 4:23–27

1. Notice how guarding the heart flows right into actions
2. These ways not only flow from right desires, but they also reinforce them until the right desires are firmly fixed in our hearts.
3. When right desires begin to flag, we can stoke them back to a white-hot flame by doing the deeds of righteousness

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. ⁵ Remember the height from which you have fallen! **Repent and do the things you did at first.** Revelation 2:4–5

- a. Jesus is critiquing their love (desire) - and the solution is returning to proper actions!
- b. This is not speaking of going through the motions in some lifeless manner, not caring about the state of our heart
- c. The relationship between desire and actions is ultimately symbiotic: proper desires fuel proper actions, and proper actions reinforce proper desires.

IV. Applying the Word

- A. Do I see the need to be changed as a person?
1. There are no real “LifeHacks” that change us
 2. For a true, lasting change in actions and character, we must be changed from the inside out
 3. We always want the easy way to get results that does not really require us to change, but this is a fool’s errand.
 4. This is why Scripture speaks of being born again, being regenerated, dying to our old self, putting off the old man and putting on Christ - all these speak to a total transformation of who we are.
 5. We love self-help books and tips that will supposedly make dramatic changes in our lives, but these almost never work, because surface changes will eventually fade and our true character will come through.
 6. Do I really want to see changes in the areas we have discussed in this series?
 7. Which area is the Spirit speaking to me that He desires to effect real change?
 - a. Words
 - b. Friendships
 - c. Generosity
 - d. Knowing and loving limits
 - e. Anger and rage
 8. Ask the Spirit to show you one area and let Him work

B. Gospel Resources for Real Change

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Ezekiel 36:25–27

1. v25 - we have been cleansed from idols and sin
2. v26 - We have been given a new heart and spirit
3. v27 - we have been given the Spirit to empower us to obey God
4. God has effected this change for every single believer - we are no longer the same!
5. If you are not a believer, respond today!
6. Believers, the Spirit is always at work to change us from the inside out.
7. God has given us the means of grace to empower us in our walks and change us
8. Don't let the enemy or the world steal this precious inheritance from you! You are not identified by your past or your sins - you are changed!

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6:9–11

9. Come to the Table of Strength

Guarding the Heart

Proverbs 4:20-27

June 9, 2019

Communion

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Teaching keywords: Wisdom and Knowledge; character; Christian life; sanctification; salvation and deliverance

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24

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. Proverbs 4:20–27