

# Guarding Your Heart

The collection of Proverbs is full of both divine wisdom and practical counsel. There are incredibly important pieces of advice that are packed into the small couplets of pithy sayings known as the Proverbs. One of those is Proverbs 4:23. It reads,

*Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life. (NASB)*

The New International Version translates the verse this way:

*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. (NIV)*

Why is it critical to guard your heart? Chuck Swindoll writes,

*To unveil our hearts and put all our secrets on display is to open ourselves to enemy attack. Our Lord is pleased when we reserve an “inner vault” of our lives to hold His treasures. To “tell it all” is to traffic in a world of superficiality. ( Living Beyond The Daily Grind, p. 184.)*

Let's begin by putting a definition to the word “heart.” What comes to your mind when you read this word, “heart”?

Did you know that *Labe*, the Hebrew word for “heart,” is used 900 times in the Old Testament? 899 times it is used as a figure of speech, and only one time refers to the actual physical organ in our body.

*Labe* is used over ninety times in Proverbs alone. It has to do with our whole inner being – the center of our mind, our emotions and our will. It is the inner self, the place where God speaks to you through His Word and Spirit. What, then, does it mean to “guard” your heart? Record your thoughts below.

There are three significant observations that can be drawn from this verse.

- a. **It is a command** -- “*Watch over!*” “*Guard!*” It was obviously something that Solomon thought was extremely important for our spiritual survival.
- b. **There is an intense priority included in this command** -- “*with all diligence.*” We are to give it the utmost priority.

- c. **There is a reason given for the command** -- It is stated in the last part of the verse and begins with the word “*for*.” It could be translated “*because*” and it gives the reason why we should protect our hearts.

Let's look more closely at each of those points.

## I. The Command

The verb “to guard” comes from a noun which means “a place of confinement.” It is occasionally rendered “prison,” and in a broader sense means something that is closely observed, protected, preserved or guarded.

What are some practical ways that you could guard your heart or inner being?

## II. The Priority

The phrase translated “*with all diligence*” is actually placed at the beginning of the verse in the original Hebrew for added emphasis. As if highlighting what is to come, Solomon begins, “*Above everything else . . .*” or “*Here is priority number one.*”

Why is it such a priority to protect your heart?

## III. The Reason

The second half of the verse begins with the word “for.” We are told why we should guard our heart: “For from it flow the springs of life.” What does that phrase imply?

Think of three ways you could do a better job of “guarding your heart.” What has been allowed to slip in that could make it insensitive or slow to react to God’s direction? Make an evaluation in these three areas:

My mind:

My emotions:

My will:

Doubts often come as a result of a lack of guidance in our lives. This verse, Proverbs 4:23, is tucked in the middle of a chapter dealing with divine guidance. Read the entire chapter and list all the ways you see God directing His children.

## Conclusion

Allow me to summarize the chapter. Solomon discusses four ways God directs us:

- a. In verses 1-4, studying the Word of our Father gives us guidance. We are to give specific attention to the teachings of Scripture and not to abandon them.
- b. In verses 5-7, we are directed to apply practical common sense in determining His will. “Wisdom,” the art of living, is to be embraced and followed.
- c. In verses 10,11 and 20-22, Solomon reminds us of the value of having trustworthy counselors to aid us. Specifically, he wrote to his own child, assuring him that the counsel of a godly parent is one of several ways God directs our hearts.

- d. In verses 26-27, we are told to personally evaluate our lives. Meditating on God's previous direction and current leading will give us added insight.

As you look over that list, which has proven the most helpful to you? Why?

We need to remember always that the clearest statements of the will of God for our lives are to be found in the Bible. We fall easily into the trap of “cultural Christianity” where we develop our convictions and opinions from those around us. We ought always to go to the Word of God first and foremost, and to evaluate all advice against the Scriptures.

Elisabeth Elliot wrote these insightful words about knowing the will of God:

*“I am in earnest about forsaking 'the world' and following Christ. But I am puzzled about worldly things. What is it I must forsake?” a young man asks.*

*“Colored clothes, for one thing. Get rid of everything in your wardrobe that is not white. Stop sleeping on a soft pillow. Sell your musical instruments and don't eat any more white bread. You cannot, if you are sincere about obeying Christ, take warm baths or shave your beard. To shave is to lie against Him who created us, to attempt to improve on His work.”*

*Does this answer sound absurd? It is the answer given in the most celebrated Christian schools of the second century! Is it possible that the rules that have been adopted by many twentieth century Christians will sound as absurd to learned followers of Christ a few years hence? (The Liberty of Obedience, p. 45-46.)*

## Suggested Reading

*Guard Your Heart*, Gary Rosberg (Multnomah Press)

*The Man in the Mirror*, Patrick Moreley (Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers)

*The Measure of a Man, The Measure of a Woman*, Gene Getz (Moody Press)

# Conclusion

As Christians attempting to build a solid foundation of faith in our lives, we're attacked by all kinds of doubts. Sometimes our response to these doubts is good: we begin to ask some hard questions about the things we believe and we are driven toward solid answers in the Scriptures. Our faith becomes stronger as a result.

Other times we lose perspective and we become like the man in the book of James who was *"driven and tossed by the wind . . . double-minded, unstable in all his ways"* (James 1:6-8).

It really gets down to choices. In fact, the more I grow in my Christian life, the more I believe **choice** really is the key word to my growth. Here are a few of the choices we must make:

## I. Choosing to Believe the Word of God

Hebrews 4:12 says *"The Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* (NASB) God's Word is powerful. It penetrates to the very core of our being. We must choose to be "in the Word" and the Word needs to be "in us" on a daily basis.

## II. Choosing to Pray

The promises of God remain true, no matter what the outer trials or inner turmoils might be. Our God reigns. He is constant, unchanging. And He invites us to come and pour out our hearts before Him. In this study, we've looked at a number of the Psalms. And perhaps for good reason. David was one who poured out his heart to God - because he knew God cared and understood. Let's choose to follow his example!

## III. Choosing to Trust the Holy Spirit in our Lives

On the last night Jesus was with His men before the crucifixion, He told them, *"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another (allos, another of the same kind - just like Him!) Helper (comforter, enabler, companion), that He may be with you forever;*

*that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans . . . . It's to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. . . . But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak, and He will disclose to you what is to come.” (John 14:16-18; 16:7,13,14, explanation mine)  
(NASB)*

God has given us His Holy Spirit to empower us, to take us victoriously through this life, and to bring us safely home to heaven. And we need to choose to trust Him every step of the way.

Perhaps through this study you have begun to come to grips with your doubts. Evangelist Tom Skinner once said,

*I spent a long time trying to come to grips with my doubts and suddenly I realized that I had better come to grips with what I believe. I have since moved from the agony of questions that I cannot answer to the reality of answers that I cannot escape . . . and it's a great relief.*

Let's choose to do that. And as we do, we'll lay a solid foundation for growth in our lives.