Guard Your Heart

Leader’s Guide and Student Questions

Discussion material for high school youth groups written from a reformed perspective
Guard Your Heart
Leader’s Guide

Pastor Paul T. Murphy
Lesson 1: Introduction

Read Proverbs 4:23.

Our hearts pump at a rate of 70-75 beats per minute. Though weighing only 11 ounces on average, a healthy heart pumps 2,000 gallons of blood through 60,000 miles of blood vessels each day. Every day, the heart creates enough energy to drive a truck 20 miles. In a lifetime, that is equivalent to driving to the moon and back. A healthy heart can do amazing things. Conversely, if our heart malfunctions, our whole body shuts down.

The same could be said of our “spiritual heart.” In Scripture, the word heart represents the center of our emotions, thinking, and reasoning. It is the “command center” of our life.

Definitions: What does the Bible mean about Heart and Guard?

HEART: Your “heart” in the Bible is that silent voice which you hear when you think. The heart is the HQ of your entire being. It is the seat and source of all that you are and all that you do. It is the workshop of spiritual and moral life. As the center of your being, the heart is what makes you YOU. Your heart determines your character and your conduct.

Proverbs 27:19 — As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man. When you look into a pool of water you can see your reflection. So also when you look into your heart you see the real you. Your heart IS who you are.

Proverbs 23:7 (KJV) — For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he. Notice that the Bible says that you are what you think in your heart.

The Bible talks about three “kinds” of heart one can have.

First, there is a hard heart. Most notably there is Pharaoh in Exodus. Another example would be the Pharisees in the Gospels. A hard heart is one that resists and rejects the Word and Spirit of God.

Second, there is the heart that is foolish and slow to believe. An example of this would be the disciples on the Emmaus road with Jesus after His resurrection. They were saying how perplexed they were by the events of Jesus’ crucifixion and subsequent empty tomb. Remember how Jesus told them they were foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken (verse 25)? A foolish heart is not unbelieving but sluggish, takes things for granted, and thinks it knows it all already. But Jesus taught them they had much to learn and understand.

Third, the Bible talks about a tender heart. This is what you should aim for. A tender heart is sensitive to and responsive towards the Word and Spirit of God.
GUARD:
The word for guard means to keep, to watch, to protect and prevent. It is like a watchman on a guard
tower or a soldier on guard duty. Their job is to keep a lookout for anything and anyone that poses a
threat to themselves or their comrades. A guard must be on constant alert, always checking, always
looking out for any threat. He is always vigilant or else his safety and those whom he protects is in
danger.

The idea is similarly conveyed by a fence, which KEEPS bad things out and good things in.

Another idea associated with KEEP is that of a garden. You need to keep, tend, and watch over a
garden or else what happens? Weeds! Your heart needs to be kept lest the weeds of sin entangle and
ensnarl you.

Read Proverbs 4:23, 23:7, 27:19 — use both the NIV & ESV.

Leaders: Begin by comparing the importance of one’s physical heart with one’s heart that the Bible
talks about.

1. Are you aware or conscious of your heart as the Bible describes it? Have you ever stopped to
consider your heart as that which makes you who you are?

2. The heart is designed to love God and your neighbor. If you examined your heart what would
you say that you loved? What sinful thoughts, desires, or deeds do you find there? What godly
thoughts, desires, and deeds do you find there?

Leaders: Use the Ten Commandments as a standard and guide for them to examine
themselves. Help them learn to see themselves as God sees them as the lamp of His Word
searches hearts. Probe a bit asking “What is most important to you, most valuable?” Note
that our text calls for you to do this “above all else.”

3. What are some other examples of people in the Bible that were hard-hearted? Tender hearted?

Leaders: Consider who in the Scripture resisted and rejected God when He came to them.
Who are those commended as responding to God promptly and obediently?
4. What is the importance of our homeland security agency?

Leaders: The Heidelberg says that we have three sworn enemies — the world, the flesh, and the devil. They never stop attacking us. Highlight the importance of being diligent and vigilant in guarding the heart or else!

5. What happens in a garden or field if weeds are allowed to grow unchecked?

Leaders: Emphasize what the Heidelberg says about our enemies NEVER stopping their attack. An unguarded heart is vulnerable and susceptible to attack, at times without them even knowing it!
Lesson 2: Demands — Why Must You Guard Your Heart?

Why must you guard your heart?

A. It is your primary priority. Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) reads “Above all else...” The ESV says “...with all vigilance.”

Guarding your heart must be first and foremost for a Christian. Since your heart is the seat and center of your spiritual life and your relationship with God, it must take priority “above all else.” The quality of your spiritual life will be no higher than the guarding of your heart. Your spiritual vitality depends upon it. Your usefulness to the Lord and to others depends upon guarding your heart. Sin from both within and without constantly threatens you.

B. Your heart determines all else. “… for everything you do flows from it”(NIV).

Proverbs likens your heart to a cascading fountain where everything flows from the source. Your heart is the source for all that you are and all that you do. In fact, the surrounding context supplies us with a visual picture of this reality. It presents an anatomy of discipleship with your heart at the “center.”

My son, be attentive to my words;
incline your ear to my sayings.

Let them not escape from your sight;
keep them within your heart.

For they are life to those who find them,
and healing to all their flesh.

Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life.

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 to the left;
turn your foot away from evil.
C. God tests hearts — the condition of your heart and whether or not it is well-guarded is something that God cares about and that He scrutinizes.

Proverbs 21:2 — A person may think their own ways are right, but the Lord weighs the heart.
Proverbs 17:3 — The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart.
Hebrews 4:13 — Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight.
   Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

If God can see whatever is in our hearts and knows everything about us, even our “secret thoughts,” then we would do well to guard our hearts and care for them.

I hope you can see, appreciate, and apprehend why it is so vital that you guard your heart.

**Leaders:** Explore the area of what the heart is tempted to love. What is it that is most important? Let this be a time of heart searching and reflection.

1. John Calvin said that our hearts are idol factories. Are there persons or things that you love more than the Lord?

2. Read Jeremiah 17:9 — given the sinfulness of our hearts, what will inevitably happen if you are not vigilant?

3. What is the connection between your spiritual health and vitality and the condition of your heart?

4. How will guarding your heart affect or not affect your usefulness to the Lord? What is the connection between what your heart loves and your usefulness to the Lord and others?

**Leaders:** Since the heart is the source of one’s character and conduct, spend some time considering the anatomy of discipleship in Proverbs 4:20-23.

1. Character question — what virtues and values that are distinctly Christian should be produced by your hearts? What are those things that either promote or prevent them from characterizing your life? Plan to deal with them.
2. Read Matthew 12:34 — is a “potty mouth” or barnyard language acceptable for a Christian? Why or why not?

3. Read Matthew 15:10-20 — according to Jesus, does sin reside in things like movies or rock music? If not, then how can your heart make those things sinful?

   **Leaders:** Explain the difference between legalism and Christian liberty. Legalism goes beyond the Bible (1 Corinthians 4:6) in an attempt to be holier than God. Christian liberty recognizes that our sinful hearts can take something God says is “Good” and make it sinful, e.g., sex.

4. Are there sins that come from the heart that are not so bad?

   **Leaders:** Matthew 15:19 teaches us that evil thoughts, slander, and lying are as sinful and serious as murder, adultery, and sexual immorality.

**Leaders:** Since God tests our hearts, encourage them to take a test of their own hearts. Read Matthew 12:33-35, Mark 7:6, Ephesians 4:29-32.

1. The barometer, index, and gauge of our hearts can be seen in your mouths (according to Jesus in Matthew 13:33-35). What does your mouth reveal about your heart? What it loves?

2. What is the hypocrisy Jesus identifies in Mark 7?

3. Are you a proud person? How many times are these words found in your speech — I, me, my? Are you often talking about yourself?

4. Does your speech contain flirting, jealousy, gossip? Maybe you don’t say them, but do you listen? (See Proverbs 17:4.)
Leaders: Read Ephesians 4:29-32 and note the connection between one’s speech and grieving the Holy Spirit.

5. Does your speech build others up? Give grace to those who hear? Grieve the Holy Spirit? If so, what can you do to change your heart?

Leaders: Encourage a heart test to be done on a regular basis in preparation for the Lord’s Supper.
Lesson 3: Delights and Dangers

Delights of a Guarded Heart & Dangers of an Unguarded Heart

DELIGHTS of a Guarded Heart

A. All the blessings of covenant life — Deuteronomy 5:29 — Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!

As Israel prepares to enter the Promised Land, God has just given them His Ten Commandments again. Here He tells them that if their hearts are in the right place, if they are properly guarded if you will, then they will enjoy God, all the benefits of a living, loving relationship with Him, and what it means to glorify Him in all of life. What a blessed life that is!

B. Peace and Assurance — 1 John 3:21 — Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;

Assurance of your salvation is a blessing that comes from being right with God. Note how John here says that a properly guarded heart results in having that assurance, peace, and confidence. You can actually know that God loves you, that you are right with Him, and that this is a sure thing.

C. You can live a resurrected life — Colossians 3:1f. — Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Paul, at this point in Colossians, is starting to relate what difference the Gospel makes in a person’s life or when the rubber hits the road how the Gospel works itself out in your daily life. He indicates that the Christian life is one of being raised, resurrected with Jesus. A properly guarded heart is one that is set on living that resurrected life and actually does so by the power of Christ’s Spirit.

Leaders: The above are motivations presented to encourage one to guard their heart. Motivation is a very important consideration in the Christian life. It is a force for change and sanctification.

Here is a place for you to probe the “love” of their hearts. How important are the above? Where are they on the scale of priorities, desires, and aspirations? You will need to help them get to know their own hearts. Help them to see that this is the God-glorifying, God-enjoying life that excels. Introduce them to delighting themselves in God (Psalm 37:4). Lead them to taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8). Make the teaching of God our Savior attractive so they want these things with all their hearts (Titus 2:10).
DANGERS of an Unguarded Heart

A. Mere external religion — our text in Proverbs 4 informs us that Biblical religion is that which proceeds from the heart. If our hearts are unguarded, we risk the danger of our religion being just a matter of externals. As Paul says, ... “having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.” 2 Timothy 3:5 says Biblical religion comes from a heart that has been made new by the Holy Spirit. Such a heart is not just going through the motions, it isn’t putting on an act, and it isn’t a show. Rather a heart made new is one that radiates Holy Spirit-filled life into everything it does.

Read Isaiah 29:13 and Jeremiah 7:1-11. Israel repeatedly relied upon externalities in their religion and God repeatedly condemned them for it.

1. What is one of the things that make true, Biblical religion different than all other religions?

2. What is necessary in one’s heart for it to be pleasing and acceptable to God?

3. Where do you see similar external religiosity today? How would you change that? How could that be changed?

B. Prayers are unheard by God — Psalm 66:18 — *If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.* God does not hear the prayers of everyone and anyone. He hears only the prayers that come to Him in Jesus’ Name, from those who are His children. Yet, even if one is a Christian, if there is unconfessed and unrepented sin, then that kind of heart prevents those prayers from being heard.

1. Does God hear the prayers of non-Christians? Supply Scripture.
   **Leaders:** *John 9:31*

2. Where in the Bible does it teach that sin prevents God from hearing the prayers of a believer?
   **Leaders:** *Proverbs 21:13, 28:9; James 4:3; 1 Peter 3:7*

3. Is unanswered prayer always an indication of a sinful, unrepentant heart?
   **Leaders:** *Explain John 9:1-3*
C. Spiritual life is choked out — Hebrews 3:12 f. — See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. When you look at the context, the author is talking about Israel and the generation that came out of Egypt in the Exodus. But their hearts were not right with God, they were unguarded and we are told they did not enter into the Promised Land due to their unbelief and disobedience. BEWARE the deceitfulness of sin! And guard your heart.

1. How does sin deceive your heart?

   **Leaders:** You may want to talk about how sin looks attractive and satisfying yet fails to show the “bad side” of sin, e.g., excessive drinking in beer commercials that don’t show drunks hugging toilet bowls as they throw up. Or how sexual promiscuity is glamorized in media but you aren’t shown STDs, AIDS, abortions and the guilt that attends them, etc.

2. Read Hebrews 2:1 — the seeds of total apostasy are contained in every sin. If you do not guard your heart, the danger is that you will drift away. Sin first gets a toehold, then a foothold, then it gains a stronghold, and eventually it becomes a stranglehold that chokes all the life right out of you. Beware!

3. Can you think of examples of people to whom this happened?

**Doing This — How do you guard your heart?**

1. Of course the first thing is that you need a new heart. You do not want to guard the heart we have by nature. You want God to give you a new heart to guard. Jesus in John 3, speaking to a member of Israel, the covenant people, said, “You must be born again.” The reason is that the sin of Adam and Eve is inherited by every person and thus everyone needs a new heart (Jer. 31, Ezek. 36).

   **Leaders:** You may want to reference the first question and answer of the baptismal form. What is stated there is true of everyone baptized into the Name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You should be sensitive to the context you are in. This is NOT promoting some sort of conversion experience a la Baptist theology. Many, if not most, will never remember a time when they did not know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. That is what is normal in the Bible. (In 2 Timothy 3:15 the word is “infancy.”) Paul’s dramatic adult conversion (Acts 9) is the exception not the norm.
2. Aim high — aim for your heart to be tender to and for God. Aim to have a heart that is sensitive to God, His Word, and His Spirit. You want to have a heart that responds immediately to the voice of your God and Savior.

**Leaders:** Read 2 Kings 22:1, 2, 8-13 then verses 18-19 for a good example of a tender heart. Read also Isaiah 66:2 for what God values in our hearts.

3. Our text in Proverbs supplies us with an anatomy of discipleship. It uses the parts of the body as directed by your heart. The reverse is also true. Various entrances into it affect your heart.

a. Guard your eyes — they are the windows of your heart. Be sure to have a screen filtering what you let in. The Internet, TV, movies, advertisements are all potential dangers to be guarded against.

**Leaders:** Perhaps gather the stats on pornography; they are shocking. It is a problem for BOTH men and women. There are almost certainly young people who are struggling with it in your group. That may need an entirely different session or sessions. Be sensitive to the medium of TV. It makes one passive before it (hence couch potatoes and vidiots). What does passively sitting in front of the TV do to one’s heart (even if the content is “wholesome”?):

b. Guard your ears — music and gossip can both be dangerous to your heart.

**Leaders:** Recall that the music is not sinful in itself, but what is the heart doing with it? How is the heart affected by it?

c. Guard your mouth — it is the barometer of your heart. Jesus says that what comes from your mouth originates in your heart. Our hearts are sinful, so you need to watch what you let out of your mouth. God has set two guards on your mouth — your teeth and lips. Let them protect others from any harmful product of your sinful heart.

d. Guard your feet — remember that your heart determines conduct. Is your conduct consistent with God’s Word?
4. Use the Word of God to guard your heart — Psalm 119:11 — *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.* I commend to you two means of doing this that will aid you greatly: memorization and meditation. They are two good tools for you to use to hide God’s Word in your heart and thus guard it from sinning against God.

**Leaders:** Neither of these are popular in our circles, but they are neglected to our own danger. Read Psalm 1 for example on meditation. Christian meditation differs from Eastern religion’s meditation because in the latter the goal is to empty your mind, whereas in CM the goal is to fill the mind/heart with Scripture so as to feed and feast on it. The image in Psalm 1 is of a cow chewing the cud. It may be gross, but it portrays the idea quite well.

Memorization is similarly uncommon yet equally beneficial and profitable in guarding the heart. It supplies the Holy Spirit with “ammunition” for your spiritual well being both in character and conduct.

5. Be careful about choosing friends — In Proverbs 1:10 & 15 — *My son, if sinful men entice you, do not give in to them ... my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths.* Likewise Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:33 warns “*Do not be deceived: Bad company ruins good morals.*” Peer pressure is a reality, and bad peer pressure will lead your heart astray.

**Leaders:** While our society uses the term “peer pressure” the Bible calls it “the fear of man.” This can only be replaced by the fear of God (see RYS study by me on that topic). Most of us are people pleasers and the most terrifying thing to many teens is that they would be rejected or not liked by their peers. Note that both “fears” are matters of where the heart is.

6. Listen to your parents — 24 times in Proverbs the reader is exhorted to listen to their mother and/or father. The entire book is a series of instructions from a father to a son guiding him on the right path of wisdom. Neglecting the instruction of parents is setting your heart up for danger.

**Leaders:** Teens think they know it all and that their parents are “clueless.” Caution them against such worldly thinking. Proverbs is imparting wisdom to teens, especially young men. Remind the teens that their parents are sinners like them and most surely have gone through the same temptations, struggles, experiences, and trials that they face. Having “been there and done that” actually makes parents valuable resources for learning how to live a godly life. God has given them to guide and to guard the hearts of their children.
7. Worship and preaching — in corporate worship on Sunday when you hear the sermon, it is Jesus Christ speaking to you. That is the chief means of grace that God has appointed to guide you in life and to guard your heart as He speaks to you.

**Leaders:** Read Romans 10:13-17. Note the progression — salvation results from calling on the Name of the Lord (v. 13), but first they must believe (v. 14), but in order for that to happen they must hear Him (not of Him but Him, who? Jesus), in order to hear Jesus they must be preached to (v. 14b). This is confirmed by verse 17 where we are told faith comes from hearing Jesus (in the aforementioned preaching). There are many other confirmations of this in the NT. See also the Second Helvetic Confession on the Word of God “the preached Word of God is the Word of God.”

I cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance of weekly attendance at corporate worship and proper attention to the preaching.

8. Know what God knows about your heart — Jeremiah 17:9 — The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick, who can understand it? There are depths and depravity in your heart that you will never be able to know. Our hearts are sin-full and depraved. As time goes on in the life of a Christian, you realize more and more just how sin-full your heart is. That COULD lead you to despair and even depression if ... we did not also have verse 10 in the same chapter — “I the Lord search the heart...” Just think — God knows the worst about you. He knows the depths and depravity of your heart that you will never know. He knows every sin in thought, word, and deed you ever committed and ever will commit. Yet He STILL loved you! Paul tells us that “Christ died for the ungodly” and “while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:6, 8). Think of it. It seems too good to be true. But it is, that is the Gospel.

**Leaders:** There is no substitute for the Gospel to woo and win hearts for the Lord. Press this truth home and seek for it to impact their hearts. Our catechism says that we are righteous with God only by faith in Jesus, and then God sees us not in our sins but “as if we had never sinned nor been a sinner, and as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me.” (HC #60)

Martin Luther said we need to hammer the gospel into our heads over and over because we are so prone to forget. Hammer away with all the winsomeness and mercy of Christ.

“My son, give me your heart.” Proverbs 23:26
God wants nothing less than for us to love Him with all our hearts.
Guard Your Heart
Student Questions

Pastor Paul T. Murphy
Lesson 1: Introduction

Read Proverbs 4:23.

Our hearts pump at a rate of 70-75 beats per minute. Though weighing only 11 ounces on average, a healthy heart pumps 2,000 gallons of blood through 60,000 miles of blood vessels each day. Every day, the heart creates enough energy to drive a truck 20 miles. In a lifetime, that is equivalent to driving to the moon and back. A healthy heart can do amazing things. Conversely, if our heart malfunctions, our whole body shuts down.

The same could be said of our “spiritual heart.” In Scripture, the word heart represents the center of our emotions, thinking, and reasoning. It is the “command center” of our life.

Definitions: What does the Bible mean about Heart and Guard?

**HEART:**
Your “heart” in the Bible is that silent voice which you hear when you think. The heart is the HQ of your entire being. It is the seat and source of all that you are and all that you do. It is the workshop of spiritual and moral life. As the center of your being, the heart is what makes you YOU. Your heart determines your character and your conduct.

Proverbs 27:19 — As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man. When you look into a pool of water you can see your reflection. So also when you look into your heart you see the real you. Your heart IS who you are.

Proverbs 23:7 (KJV) — For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he. Notice that the Bible says that you are what you think in your heart.

The Bible talks about three “kinds” of heart one can have.

First, there is a hard heart. Most notably there is Pharaoh in Exodus. Another example would be the Pharisees in the Gospels. A hard heart is one that resists and rejects the Word and Spirit of God.

Second, there is the heart that is foolish and slow to believe. An example of this would be the disciples on the Emmaus road with Jesus after His resurrection. They were saying how perplexed they were by the events of Jesus’ crucifixion and subsequent empty tomb. Remember how Jesus told them they were foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken (verse 25)? A foolish heart is not unbelieving but sluggish, takes things for granted, and thinks it knows it all already. But Jesus taught them they had much to learn and understand.

Third, the Bible talks about a tender heart. This is what you should aim for. A tender heart is sensitive to and responsive towards the Word and Spirit of God.
**GUARD:**
The word for guard means to keep, to watch, to protect and prevent. It is like a watchman on a guard tower or a soldier on guard duty. Their job is to keep a lookout for anything and anyone that poses a threat to themselves or their comrades. A guard must be on constant alert, always checking, always looking out for any threat. He is always vigilant or else his safety and those whom he protects is in danger.

The idea is similarly conveyed by a fence, which KEEPS bad things out and good things in.

Another idea associated with KEEP is that of a garden. You need to keep, tend, and watch over a garden or else what happens? Weeds! Your heart needs to be kept lest the weeds of sin entangle and ensnarl you.

Read Proverbs 4:23, 23:7, 27:19 — use both the NIV & ESV.

1. Are you aware or conscious of your heart as the Bible describes it? Have you ever stopped to consider your heart as that which makes you who you are?

2. The heart is designed to love God and your neighbor. If you examined your heart what would you say that you loved? What sinful thoughts, desires, or deeds do you find there? What godly thoughts, desires, and deeds do you find there?

3. What are some other examples of people in the Bible that were hard-hearted? Tender hearted?

4. What is the importance of our homeland security agency?

5. What happens in a garden or field if weeds are allowed to grow unchecked?
Lesson 2: Demands — Why Must You Guard Your Heart?

Why must you guard your heart?

A. It is your primary priority. Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) reads “Above all else...” The ESV says “...with all vigilance.”

Guarding your heart must be first and foremost for a Christian. Since your heart is the seat and center of your spiritual life and your relationship with God, it must take priority “above all else.” The quality of your spiritual life will be no higher than the guarding of your heart. Your spiritual vitality depends upon it. Your usefulness to the Lord and to others depends upon guarding your heart. Sin from both within and without constantly threatens you.

B. Your heart determines all else. “... for everything you do flows from it”(NIV).

Proverbs likens your heart to a cascading fountain where everything flows from the source. Your heart is the source for all that you are and all that you do. In fact, the surrounding context supplies us with a visual picture of this reality. It presents an anatomy of discipleship with your heart at the “center.”

My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. 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 to the left; turn your foot away from evil.
C. God tests hearts — the condition of your heart and whether or not it is well-guarded is something that God cares about and that He scrutinizes.

Proverbs 21:2 — A person may think their own ways are right, but the Lord weighs the heart.
Proverbs 17:3 — The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart.
Hebrews 4:13 — Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

If God can see whatever is in our hearts and knows everything about us, even our “secret thoughts,” then we would do well to guard our hearts and care for them.

I hope you can see, appreciate, and apprehend why it is so vital that you guard your heart.

1. John Calvin said that our hearts are idol factories. Are there persons or things that you love more than the Lord?

2. Read Jeremiah 17:9 — given the sinfulness of our hearts, what will inevitably happen if you are not vigilant?

3. What is the connection between your spiritual health and vitality and the condition of your heart?

4. How will guarding your heart affect or not affect your usefulness to the Lord? What is the connection between what your heart loves and your usefulness to the Lord and others?
Read Proverbs 4:20-23.

1. Character question — what virtues and values that are distinctly Christian should be produced by your hearts? What are those things that either promote or prevent them from characterizing your life? Plan to deal with them.

2. Read Matthew 12:34 — is a “potty mouth” or barnyard language acceptable for a Christian? Why or why not?

3. Read Matthew 15:10-20 — according to Jesus, does sin reside in things like movies or rock music? If not, then how can your heart make those things sinful?

4. Are there sins that come from the heart that are not so bad?


1. The barometer, index, and gauge of our hearts can be seen in your mouths (according to Jesus in Matthew 13:33-35). What does your mouth reveal about your heart? What it loves?

2. What is the hypocrisy Jesus identifies in Mark 7?

3. Are you a proud person? How many times are these words found in your speech — I, me, my? Are you often talking about yourself?
4. Does your speech contain flirting, jealousy, gossip? Maybe you don’t say them, but do you listen? (See Proverbs 17:4.)

Read Ephesians 4:29-32.

5. Does your speech build others up? Give grace to those who hear? Grieve the Holy Spirit? If so, what can you do to change your heart?
Lesson 3: Delights and Dangers

Delights of a Guarded Heart & Dangers of an Unguarded Heart

DELIGHTS of a Guarded Heart

A. All the blessings of covenant life — Deuteronomy 5:29 — Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!

As Israel prepares to enter the Promised Land, God has just given them His Ten Commandments again. Here He tells them that if their hearts are in the right place, if they are properly guarded if you will, then they will enjoy God, all the benefits of a living, loving relationship with Him, and what it means to glorify Him in all of life. What a blessed life that is!

B. Peace and Assurance — 1 John 3:21 — Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;

Assurance of your salvation is a blessing that comes from being right with God. Note how John here says that a properly guarded heart results in having that assurance, peace, and confidence. You can actually know that God loves you, that you are right with Him, and that this is a sure thing.

C. You can live a resurrected life — Colossians 3:1f. — Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Paul, at this point in Colossians, is starting to relate what difference the Gospel makes in a person’s life or when the rubber hits the road how the Gospel works itself out in your daily life. He indicates that the Christian life is one of being raised, resurrected with Jesus. A properly guarded heart is one that is set on living that resurrected life and actually does so by the power of Christ’s Spirit.
DANGERS of an Unguarded Heart

A. Mere external religion — our text in Proverbs 4 informs us that Biblical religion is that which proceeds from the heart. If our hearts are unguarded, we risk the danger of our religion being just a matter of externals. As Paul says, ... “having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.” 2 Timothy 3:5 says Biblical religion comes from a heart that has been made new by the Holy Spirit. Such a heart is not just going through the motions, it isn’t putting on an act, and it isn’t a show. Rather a heart made new is one that radiates Holy Spirit-filled life into everything it does.

Read Isaiah 29:13 and Jeremiah 7:1-11. Israel repeatedly relied upon externalities in their religion and God repeatedly condemned them for it.

1. What is one of the things that make true, Biblical religion different than all other religions?

2. What is necessary in one’s heart for it to be pleasing and acceptable to God?

3. Where do you see similar external religiosity today? How would you change that? How could that be changed?

B. Prayers are unheard by God — Psalm 66:18 — *If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.* God does not hear the prayers of everyone and anyone. He hears only the prayers that come to Him in Jesus’ Name, from those who are His children. Yet, even if one is a Christian, if there is unconfessed and unrepented sin, then that kind of heart prevents those prayers from being heard.

1. Does God hear the prayers of non-Christians? Supply Scripture.

2. Where in the Bible does it teach that sin prevents God from hearing the prayers of a believer?
3. Is unanswered prayer always an indication of a sinful, unrepentant heart?

C. Spiritual life is choked out — Hebrews 3:12 f. — See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. When you look at the context, the author is talking about Israel and the generation that came out of Egypt in the Exodus. But their hearts were not right with god, they were unguarded and we are told they did not enter into the Promised Land due to their unbelief and disobedience. BEWARE the deceitfulness of sin! And guard your heart.

1. How does sin deceive your heart?

2. Read Hebrews 2:1 — the seeds of total apostasy are contained in every sin. If you do not guard your heart, the danger is that you will drift away. Sin first gets a toehold, then a foothold, then it gains a stronghold, and eventually it becomes a stranglehold that chokes all the life right out of you. Beware!

3. Can you think of examples of people to whom this happened?

Doing This — How do you guard your heart?

1. Of course the first thing is that you need a new heart. You do not want to guard the heart we have by nature. You want God to give you a new heart to guard. Jesus in John 3, speaking to a member of Israel, the covenant people, said, “You must be born again.” The reason is that the sin of Adam and Eve is inherited by every person and thus everyone needs a new heart (Jer. 31, Ezek. 36).
2. Aim high — aim for your heart to be tender to and for God. Aim to have a heart that is sensitive to God, His Word, and His Spirit. You want to have a heart that responds immediately to the voice of your God and Savior.

3. Our text in Proverbs supplies us with an anatomy of discipleship. It uses the parts of the body as directed by your heart. The reverse is also true. Various entrances into it affect your heart.
   a. Guard your eyes — they are the windows of your heart. Be sure to have a screen filtering what you let in. The Internet, TV, movies, advertisements are all potential dangers to be guarded against.
   b. Guard your ears — music and gossip can both be dangerous to your heart.
   c. Guard your mouth — it is the barometer of your heart. Jesus says that what comes from your mouth originates in your heart. Our hearts are sinful, so you need to watch what you let out of your mouth. God has set two guards on your mouth — your teeth and lips. Let them protect others from any harmful product of your sinful heart.
   d. Guard your feet — remember that your heart determines conduct. Is your conduct consistent with God’s Word?
4. Use the Word of God to guard your heart — Psalm 119:11 — *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.* I commend to you two means of doing this that will aid you greatly: memorization and meditation. They are two good tools for you to use to hide God’s Word in your heart and thus guard it from sinning against God.

5. Be careful about choosing friends — In Proverbs 1:10 & 15 — *My son, if sinful men entice you, do not give in to them … my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths.* Likewise Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:33 warns “*Do not be deceived: Bad company ruins good morals.*” Peer pressure is a reality, and bad peer pressure will lead your heart astray.

6. Listen to your parents — 24 times in Proverbs the reader is exhorted to listen to their mother and/or father. The entire book is a series of instructions from a father to a son guiding him on the right path of wisdom. Neglecting the instruction of parents is setting your heart up for danger.

7. Worship and preaching — in corporate worship on Sunday when you hear the sermon, it is Jesus Christ speaking to you. That is the chief means of grace that God has appointed to guide you in life and to guard your heart as He speaks to you.
8. Know what God knows about your heart — Jeremiah 17:9 — The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick, who can understand it? There are depths and depravity in your heart that you will never be able to know. Our hearts are sin-full and depraved. As time goes on in the life of a Christian, you realize more and more just how sin-full your heart is. That COULD lead you to despair and even depression if ... we did not also have verse 10 in the same chapter — “I the Lord search the heart...” Just think — God knows the worst about you. He knows the depths and depravity of your heart that you will never know. He knows every sin in thought, word, and deed you ever committed and ever will commit. Yet He STILL loved you! Paul tells us that “Christ died for the ungodly” and “while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:6, 8). Think of it. It seems too good to be true. But it is, that is the Gospel.

“My son, give me your heart.” Proverbs 23:26
God wants nothing less than for us to love Him with all our hearts.