

GUARD YOUR HEART

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

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TEXT: Proverbs 4:20-27

SENTENCE FOR FACEBOOK: Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.

“The Keepers of the Springs” is remembered by many as one of ‘the great sermons of the 20th century. It was preached in the late 1930’s by Peter Marshall, pastor of New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. – and was appointed two times to serve as the Chaplain of the United States Senate. The sermon begins with this story:

Once upon a time, a certain town grew up at the foot of a mountain range. High up in the hills, a quiet forest dweller was hired by the town’s council to be the keeper of the springs. With faithful, silent regularity, he patrolled the hills and removed the leaves and branches and wiped away the silt from the fresh flow of water.

The old gentle man had been hired many years earlier by a young town council to clear away the debris from the pools of water that fed the lovely spring flowing through their town. With faithful, silent

regularity, he patrolled the hills, removed the leaves and branches, and wiped away the silt from the fresh flow of water. By and by, the village became a popular attraction for vacationers. Graceful swans floated along the crystal-clear spring, farmlands were naturally irrigated, and the view from restaurants was picturesque. Children played on its banks and the gardens were refreshed.

But one night, The City Council met, and the salary paid to the town's "keeper of the spring" was questioned. One council member complained, "Who is the old man? Why do we keep him on year after year? For all we know he is doing us no good. He isn't necessary any longer!" Thus, by a unanimous vote, they did away with the unnecessary expense of a keeper of the springs.

Now you can just imagine what happened. In time, the waters of the town did not seem the same. Green scum grew on the water surface and mill machinery clogged with slime. Swans found another home and children stopped playing on the shores. At last, an epidemic raged, and sickness reached into every home.

The City Council called an emergency meeting and admitted the mistake of the dismissal of the keeper of the Springs and begged him to return to his former joyous labor. Soon the water sparkled again with freshness and mill wheels turned as of old. The foul stench disappeared, sickness waned, the swans returned, and the children were back playing at the water shore. The “keeper of the springs” was back doing his job.¹

I think this story points so well to our new sermon series that we begin today – “Guard Your Heart”. We are in such need of having a “keeper of the springs” on our hearts – to live a faithful and fruitful life of faith. In fact, guarding our hearts is something our we called to do above all else, as one of the most important things we should be doing.

Open your Bibles to the book of Proverbs. That is basically in the middle of the Bible, right after the book of Psalms. And turn to Proverbs 4 and we will be reading verses 20-27. This chapter begins with the writer, King Solomon, giving advice to his children. He says to listen carefully to the good guidance and take these words to heart. For these words will guide us, bringing us life and healing.

Beginning at verse 20, Solomon says:

²⁰*My child, pay attention to what I say.
Listen carefully to my words.*

²¹*Don't lose sight of them.*

*Let them penetrate deep into your heart,
²²for they bring life to those who find them,
and healing to their whole body.*

²³*Guard your heart above all else,
for it determines the course of your life.*

²⁴*Avoid all perverse talk;
stay away from corrupt speech.*

²⁵*Look straight ahead,
and fix your eyes on what lies before you.*

²⁶*Mark out a straight path for your feet;
stay on the safe path.*

²⁷*Don't get sidetracked;
keep your feet from following evil.*

When you hear that we are to guard our hearts – what does that mean to you? In our modern society, we often think of our hearts as our emotions or feelings – like having a broken heart or a heart that's in love. Or we relate the word “heart” with our physical heart – that amazing organ in our chest that pumps our blood and beats some 100,000 times a day. But in the Bible – and in particular here in Proverbs – the heart really means: *“the inner core of a person – the thoughts, feelings, desires, will, and choices that make that person who he/she is.”*² It is symbolic for everything in our inward lives – the

control center of our life. And whatever is inside our hearts will overflow into thoughts, words and actions.

Solomon says we are to guard our hearts because they are the source of everything we do or some other versions call it the wellspring of life. It is the fountain of life for our mind, our soul and body.

Think back to that story of the Keeper of the Spring. When the springs were not tended, they became contaminated and toxic – threatening life downstream. Everything depended on the condition of the spring. In the same way – if our hearts are like the wellspring of life – we have to take care of them and guard them. Because if our heart is unhealthy, it will impact everything – and everyone else. That is why Solomon says to guard our hearts – they are the wellspring and so drives everything about us.

Some versions put it this way: “Guard your heart – it will affect everything you do.” It affects what you see, what you say, what you do, what you hear – and most importantly, who you will worship and trust and obey.

Our hearts are so valuable – and they are also vulnerable. We are really in a battleground of who has control over our hearts. Satan knows how important they are, and he wants control – so he tries to attack and fill them with evil thoughts and actions and to pull us away from God. His goal is to harden our hearts so that the Word of God will not take root in our hearts. Our enemy will: *“use circumstances, difficult people, attitudes, habits, temptation and lies in any way he can. He will cause us to be too busy, too distracted, to self-reliant for the Word of God and if that does not work, he will make sure that He steals it from our hearts and minds.”*³ Thus, we need to be on guard, lest we fall. As Jesus told his disciples, “Watch and pray so you do not enter into temptation.”

We definitely need to guard our hearts in prayer.⁴ Colossians 4:2 says to *“devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.”* Prayer is that great weapon we can use to guard our hearts from turning away from God. I know, for me, when I find myself in a temptation or in a trial – if I change my worry or care to prayer – calling on the name of Jesus – even if that is all I can say in prayer, the name of Jesus – all of the sudden I don’t feel the weight in my heart.

The other day, I felt myself getting irritated and frustrated and I knew my attitude was about to become sour and unpleasant. But I started just saying the name of Jesus, in a prayer – and I truly believe that the name of Jesus is powerful. Slowly but surely, I was calmed down and more at peace. Jesus had protected my heart and given me strength to stand firm against the temptation

We also guard our hearts with the words we say.⁴

Proverbs 4:24 says, “*Avoid all perverse talk, stay away from corrupt speech.*” The words we say can be used for good or for ill – to build up or to tear down. We need the Holy Spirit to come and guard our tongues so that we speak only what is necessary and good for others to hear – rather than having words of gossip, slander, condemnation or lies. We need to ask God to help us control our tongues and speak words of truth and love that encourages and builds up one another in love.

We also guard our hearts in what we watch and what we focus on.⁴

Proverbs 4:25 says: “*Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you.*” Our eyes are the doorway to our soul. And Satan will use every angle he can to tempt us – and our eyes are no exception.

Remember how Eve was tempted when she saw how the tree was good for food and how delightful the fruit was to her eyes. And David didn't keep his eyes looking straight ahead when his eyes fell on the bathing Bathsheba – and he lusted after her. So, when God tells us, *“Let your eyes look directly forward and your gaze be straight before you”*, He is telling us to guard our hearts by watching what we expose ourselves to. This will affect the types of movies and television shows we watch, the books we read and the internet sites we visit. It will also affect the way we spend our money and our time. When we face the temptations that are everywhere around us -we need to allow the Holy Spirit to be a guard that will convict our hearts and turn us away from the sin we could easily fall into.

And our focus needs to be on Jesus to show us the way. We fix our eyes on Jesus – asking how would Jesus want me to live? Am I looking at what Jesus wants me to watch – focusing on what He desires for my life? Let Him guard your eyes.

We also guard our hearts by what we think.⁴ *“Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways”* it says in

Proverbs 4:26. I have always felt like the real battle in our life happens in our minds. There are so many traps for sin when we have a unrestrained thought life – thoughts that are not guarded and guided. God cares about what we think about – for our thoughts can lead to life or sin, for good or for ill. As we learn and meditate on God’s word, we can guard our thoughts and keep from falling into sin.

As Max Lucado says: *“Your mind is the doorway to your heart. The Holy Spirit is ready to help you manage and filter the thoughts that try to enter. He can help you guard your heart. He stands with you on the threshold. A thought approaches – a questionable thought. Do you throw open the door and let it enter? Of course not. Your fight to capture every thought until it acknowledges the authority of Christ. You don’t leave the door unguarded.”*⁵ The Holy Spirit can act as the filter for all those random thoughts and will teach you how to have the mind of Christ.

And finally, you can guard your heart through your actions.⁴

Proverbs 4:27 says: *“Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.”* or as the NLT says, *“Don’t get*

sidetracked". Just as our eyes and thoughts need to be guarded – so too does our steps and our actions.

Have you ever seen someone swerving in and out of their lane on a highway? It always makes me so anxious – worrying if they will run into me. I always wonder if they have fallen asleep or if they are drunk or just plain distracted because of being on their cell phone. But driving like that is just dangerous. I think God is telling us that the same is true for us when we allow ourselves to wander and follow whatever temptation comes our way...swerving this way and that. We justify our actions by saying – well everyone is doing it, or it doesn't matter what I do or it won't hurt anyone. But in reality - it is dangerous. God has given us boundaries and commandments – instructing us in the ways we should go. We should not veer off the path but trust God to direct our steps....staying on the straight and narrow path He has laid out for us.

You see guarding our hearts is really about letting God be in control – and seeking His will and ways in everything we see and think and do.

The story is told of a family whose water supply came from a spring just a few feet from the house. The pure, cold, sweet water bubbled up through a large pipe about the size of a barrel that had been sunk in the ground. One morning two huge frogs were found in the spring. No one wanted to drink from the water until the frogs had been removed, and the water had been allowed to flush over the sides for the rest of the day. Everyone wanted to make sure it was clean and pure again.⁶

You can make a parable out of the incident. Those frogs could represent those temptations - the bad thoughts and actions. And the spring of water is our hearts. If those frogs (our evil thought life) are left in the spring (our heart), the words and actions that flow from within will be contaminated. What we need is a keeper of the spring to come and remove those “frogs” and guard it to be clean and pure.

And who is that keeper of the spring? Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He can come in and clean out the thoughts, ideas, words and deeds that should not be there. And then –Jesus will fill your heart with His Holy Spirit presence. As it says in Ephesians 3, *“I pray that from*

His glorious, unlimited resources, He will empower you with inner strength through His Spirit. Then Christ will make His home in your hearts as your trust in Him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong."

Oh may that be our prayer as well - may Christ make His home in all our hearts. May it be.

LET US PRAY

INVITATION

And there could be someone here today who has never invited Jesus into your heart. What does it mean to do that? First, you must believe with your mind. Second, you must accept His love with our emotions. Third, you must decide with your will to accept Him as Lord and Savior. Admit that you are a sinner. Your heart is not pure, and you know it! Ask Him to forgive you. He died on the Cross to offer His life and blood to make that cleansing possible. He is the only one who can do that for you. Give Him your heart. He will come into your life and will never leave or forsake you.

RESOURCES

¹ “Keeper of the Spring”,
<https://waterfromrock.org/2015/10/12/keepers-of-the-spring/>
Chuck Swindoll devotional: “Keeper of the Spring”,
<https://insight.org/resources/daily-devotional/individual/the-keeper-of-the-spring>

²Got Questions, “*What Does it Mean to Guard Your Heart*”,
<https://www.gotquestions.org/guard-your-heart.html>

³Heart Treasure, “*Guard Your Spiritual Garden*”,
www.hearttreasure.net/guarding-you-spiritual-garden/

⁴Ideas for how we are to guard our hearts come from an article by
Chrystal McDowell, “*7 Ways You Can Guard Your Heart*”
Nov 05, 2014
<https://www.godtube.com/news/7-ways-you-can-guard-your-heart.html>

⁵“*Guard our heart for it is the wellspring of life by Max Lucado*”
<https://jameslau88.com/2020/05/15/guard-our-heart-for-it-is-the-wellspring-of-life-by-max-lucado/> Passage is taken from Max Lucado’s book “*A Heart Like Jesus*,” published in 2002 by W Publishing Group.

⁶From a sermon by Dennis Davidson, Guard Your Heart, 9/1/2011 on
www.sermoncentral.org