

# Guarding The Heart

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn now to where we read in the scriptures, in the book of Proverbs, in chapter 4. We can read again at verse 23. Proverbs 4 and verse 23.

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. But away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you.

Let your eyes look directly forwards, and your gaze be straight before you. If 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. But especially the words of verse 23 itself. Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

The book of Proverbs is really a book about wisdom. It mentions wisdom many times. The passage we read in chapter 4. You'll notice the word wisdom occurring a number of times.

[ 1 : 04 ] And it's somewhat difficult, perhaps, to just give a definition of what wisdom is, or what Proverbs means by wisdom. But by and large, the word wisdom, as it's used in Proverbs and elsewhere in the Bible too, it's really equivalent, if you like, or it means applying or knowing how to apply the truth to one's life.

Wisdom is really the insight, the knowledge, the ability to apply truth to our lives. God's truth. Truth you find in the word of God itself, in the Bible.

Of course, we need God's help to do that. But that's essentially what Proverbs is about. It's about wisdom. It's knowing how to live life in a way that's pleasing to God, in a way that avoids what is offensive to God, in a way that sets out to honor God.

That is wisdom in the practical sense. It's not just a matter of how your mind works. It's how you apply what you take in from the word of God to the various aspects of life as we live life from day to day.

In other words, it's really setting a pattern for life. Young folks can think about a loom, or I'm not by any means familiar with looms nowadays.

[ 2 : 25 ] They've changed since I was young. But when my father had a loom, in order to actually weave a tweed, you had to, first of all, get the basics right. You had to lay the foundation for it.

You had to tie up all the threads of the tweed. Then you had to set the loom so that it gave you the right pattern as the shuttle went across. And the tweed was then woven as all of that came together.

Well, Proverbs really, in wisdom, is really setting out the basis of life. Setting a proper foundation. Setting life's pattern. It's so important that you notice how often young people are referred to in the book of Proverbs.

Very often it's these words, My son, by which of course he means my daughter as well. It's addressing all young people in their young days. Here, in the beginning of these opening chapters, you find, My son, chapter 1, verse 8.

Here, My son, your father's instruction. Beginning of chapter 2. My son, if you receive my words. Beginning of chapter 3. My son, do not forget my teaching.

[ 3 : 32 ] Chapter 4. Here, O sons, a father's instruction. And so on it goes. Verses of chapter 5, chapter 6. Right in through chapter 6. Verse 20, My son.

Chapter 7, My son. All of these chapters. All of these references. So that all of you young people can see today, This book is for me. This is a book that's really concerned about my young life. And about my learning of wisdom. And about my coming to know how to lay a proper foundation and pattern to my life. And as part of that, he says here in chapter 4, in this verse we're looking at, verse 23.

Keep or guard your heart with all vigilance. For from it flow the springs of life. So I'm going to ask three questions. And try and answer these three questions.

And if you can follow me with these three questions, we'll know hopefully what that verse really means. And how some of the verses round about it are also connected to it. First of all, the question, what is meant by your heart?

[ 4 : 39 ] Saying here, keep your heart with all vigilance. What does he mean by your heart? That's the first question. Well, you know that in your body, you have an organ called your heart.

And that organ, your heart, physical organ of your heart, is so important to your whole body. The blood that flows to your heart and from your heart goes throughout your body.

So that if your heart isn't functioning properly, it affects the whole of your body in some way or another. Your heart is so important that it's one of the vital organs.

When your heart stops, then death sets in. Of course, I can keep it going artificially. But I'm talking about the heart by itself. When it stops functioning, the whole body stops functioning.

Because the blood is no longer pumped through to the rest of the body. That's not the heart that's mentioned here at all. The heart that's mentioned here is actually our souls.

[ 5 : 42 ] The Bible often calls our soul our heart. Our heart spiritually. Because it's at the center of our lives. And just like your heart physically is at the center of your body and affects the whole of your body.

So your soul, everything that's in your soul, affects everything that you do. Your soul, your heart in this sense of it, means your mind, your understanding, your conscience.

All of these things the Bible tells us belong to our soul, belong to our spiritual side. In contrast to our bodies, our physical side. So this is the soul.

This is our heart that's mentioned, our soul, our mind, our understanding, our conscience. And just like your heart and your body affects all of the rest of your body, so your soul affects everything you do.

Everything you do flows from your heart, flows from your soul. Your words, your language, your thoughts, your actions. They all come, as we'll see in a minute, from your soul and what your soul is like.

[ 6 : 53 ] If you're into computing, although I'm not very familiar with the insides of a computer, but there is at the heart of every computer what's called a motherboard. The motherboard is really the critical board, this part of the computer that connects all the other parts of it that work, and even things that are connected to your computer.

The motherboard is at the heart of it. So if the motherboard goes wrong, nothing else is going to be right in it. That's what he's saying here about our souls, about our heart as well. That's why he's saying we have to keep our heart with all diligence.

The Bible talks about our heart, about our mind. It uses different words, but it's always to do with our spiritual part, our inner being, if you like, in contrast to our bodies, our physical part.

Remember, Paul, for example, makes many references to our minds. In Romans chapter 8, he talks about the mind of the flesh. That's the mind that's still controlled by sin or the sinful mind.

It is, he says, enmity against God. And it's not subject to the law of God, nor can it be while it remains the sinful, carnal, fleshly mind.

[ 8 : 12 ] But the spiritual mind, or the mind of the spirit, what happens when God changes our lives, and comes into our lives and gives us the kind of mind that we ought to have, that spiritual mind, that mind of the spirit is life and peace.

Because we've come to know God as a friend. Or in chapter 12 of Romans, where Paul is telling us about what you find in the world without God, the world that doesn't want to know God.

He says, don't be conformed to this world. Don't be living your lives like the people of this world, like the people who don't like God, who don't like the gospel, like the people who don't do church and who don't want to do church, and all the people in the world and its worldliness.

Don't, he says, be like them. Don't be conformed to this world. But, he says, instead be transformed. How? By the renewing of your minds.

And so often the Bible talks about our heart, about our mind, about our soul, in all sorts of different ways. But, every time it talks about our heart, about our soul, it's talking about this critical, central, important part of our life, from which everything else actually proceeds.

[ 9 : 37 ] So, the mind, if you like, the heart, is really what governs our life, what governs what we do, what controls what we do. Everything else, your language, your behavior, everything is attached to and controlled by your mind.

That's why he's saying in verse 26, he's saying there, ponder the path of your feet. In other words, give proper attention to where you're at in your lives, to your relationship to God, to God's truth. Ponder the path of your feet. Study where you're going with your life, is what he's saying. Make sure that it's actually being worked out in your mind, that you're giving your mind, you're giving your attention to it.

Ponder it. Study it. He's saying the path of your feet, then all your ways will be sure. Because when you let the truth of God come to be the controlling influence in your life, then that really guides you in the right way.

That's what we're saying to the tweenies, which is why he's saying here, keep your heart with all vigilance, all diligence. So your heart is your soul, it's your mind, it's your understanding, it's your conscience.

[ 10 : 52 ] Ponder it. Think every day about where you are in relation to God, to the Bible, to the church, to God's truth, but especially your relationship to God himself.

And of course, I'm speaking here to myself, and to all the adults here as well, as those young folks in the campaigners groups. That's the first thing, what is meant by your heart.

It's your soul, it's your inner being. Second question, why is keeping or guarding our heart so important? Well, you notice how it's put.

It's a picture really of a stream. Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. If you go far out enough into the moor, you can see where the river Crete begins.

It begins as a tiny little stream, and then it grows as it goes on from there. And in much bigger rivers than that, you find that the river, while it begins in a very small stream, many rivers in our own country, and elsewhere in the world, before they reach the sea, they actually divide into all kinds of tributaries, or smaller channels, so that they cover a wide area.

[ 12 : 10 ] And that's the kind of picture that you have here. Here, from your heart, flow the springs of life. The different channels of your life, just like I've been mentioning earlier, your thoughts, and your actions, and your words, the things that you do, the things that you think, the things that you say, all of that comes from your soul.

And if your soul or your heart is not in good condition, it's going to affect the streams of your life. From it flow the springs of life.

The different streams and channels of your life. In other words, you think about your relationships, your decisions, your actions. All of these things come as the springs of life, the way your life develops.

And it all comes from the state of our hearts. That's why you're saying, keep your heart, guard it, watch it. We'll see what that means in a minute, and the third question.

But our heart is out in our being, and he's saying, keep your heart, because from it flow the springs of life. If you were to see pollution in a river, in a stream, sometimes you see pollution in a river, maybe it's when it comes near to where it goes into the sea.

[ 13 : 32 ] Very often, if it's a large river, like River Clyde, for example, especially if it's in an industrial area, you'll find some stuff going into the river that pollutes it, that makes it dirty, that makes it unsafe to actually drink that water.

But if a stream, the beginning, if a river is polluted where it begins, then the whole of that river is going to be affected.

And there's no use just in trying to clean up the bit that's at the end of the river before it goes into the sea, if at the very beginning of it, it's got something that's polluting it.

If some poison is flowing into it, or something dead is lying in it, then you find that the whole of that river is going to be polluted all the way from the source right down to where it enters the sea.

That's really essentially what he's saying about our life as well, and why we need to keep our heart with all vigilance, why we need to guard our hearts, because he says, from it flow the springs of life.

[ 14 : 37 ] If our life is not right in our hearts, where our life really has its center or its root, then everything else is going to be wrong as well, isn't it? You can tell a person whose heart is not right because they use bad language.

They don't treat other people properly. They say things about God which are not good. They don't regard the Bible as important.

All sorts of ways. In which people show that their heart is not as it should be. That their heart is not pure. So, why is it important to keep your heart?

Because from it flow the springs of life. Now you remember David in Psalm 51. All of us know, I'm sure, Psalm 51. That's David's prayer of repentance.

And in Psalm 51, David in verse 6, first of all, is saying to God, as he's praying to God and asking for God's forgiveness, he's saying, Lord, you desire truth in the inmost part.

[15:43] You see what he's saying? The Lord is looking for truth in our hearts, in our inmost parts. But David knows his life's gone wrong. And that his heart is not right with God.

That he's done things which God is not pleased with. That he needs to come and ask God's forgiveness, which is what he's doing in Psalm 51. So how does he go on in verse 10?

Having said, Lord, you desire truth in the inward parts. In verse 6 and verse 10 he says, Lord, create in me a clean heart. Because he's concerned that the heart, that his center of life will be pure, will be clean.

It's the fact that his heart became unclean that led him to do the things that he did in organizing the death of a man called Uriah. So that he could have his wife for himself.

Such a bad thing to do. Sinful. But he's saying, Now, Lord, create in me a clean heart. Create in me a clean heart.

[16:52] And why does he want God to create in him a clean heart? Well, not just so that he can have a relationship with God that's, again, as it should be. But he wants also to be able to teach other people about God.

And as long as his heart is not right, he can't do that. He can't speak to other people about God if he has gone wrong himself. Because they won't believe him. And that's why he says, If you create in me, Lord, a clean heart, then I will teach sinners your way.

Then I'll be able to speak convincingly. To other people. So what is meant by our heart? It means our souls. It means our mind, our understanding.

Why is it important to guard our heart? Because that's where life begins. That's where our behavior begins. That's where our relationship with God and with other people begins. It begins with a state of our hearts.

Third question. How, then, do we guard our heart? How do we go about guarding our heart? Well, first of all, we have to watch what goes into it.

[18:04] We have to watch what goes into it. Think about your physical heart. The heart of your body. That can be damaged by allowing a lot of harmful things into your body.

Drugs. Too much alcohol. Too much rich food. So many things that you can let into your body that will then affect your heart so that it will damage your heart.

And what Proverbs is saying, it's the same with our soul. It's the same with that heart. Because if we let things into our hearts which are harmful, then it's obviously going to damage our heart, affect our lives spiritually and morally.

So, watch what you're listening, watch what you're letting into your hearts. What do you listen to? What is it you see on television, in your computer games, online?

What is it that's going into your heart? What are you letting into your souls? That's of course true and important, not just for young people, but for all of us as adults here.

[19:18] Because it's not right to think about, oh well, certain programs on television are not for children, but it's okay for me to watch them because I'm an adult. If they're wrong, they're wrong. If they're sinful, they're sinful.

If it's not the kind of stuff that go into your soul, then it shouldn't go into your soul at all, young or old. Let me say this. I was pretty horrified recently, just looking at some of the lyrics that are sung today by some of the prominent singing artists in the world.

Singerslang, I'm just going to name Ariana Grande. I don't know much about her, but I know some of the lyrics of her songs and others like her who sing these songs and to which thousands of young people flock to hear them in concert or to listen to their albums online.

I was shocked at how sexually graphic, how completely polluting the words of some of these songs were.

And they're accompanied by videos which are nothing less than pornographic. That's what thousands of young people are letting into their hearts.

[ 20 : 38 ] That's the pollution that's entering into their minds. That's what they're imbibing day after day. And they don't have to nowadays have it in any other form but on their mobile phones.

So I say to myself and I say to you as well as parents or as grandparents, do you know what your children are listening to? Are you in control of what they're watching? Are they letting into their souls things which are damaging them day by day?

Is their heart being polluted? Is the source of their life being adversely affected by that filth and stuff of the world? Be careful, young people.

Be careful. Watch what you let into your hearts. Just because it's acceptable in the world doesn't mean it's good for you. Just because the majority of young people might want that doesn't mean it's the kind of thing that you should look for.

That's why you find the contrast here in verses 20 and 21. My son, be attentive to my words. Incline your ear to my sayings.

[ 21 : 50 ] Let them not escape from your sight. Keep them within your heart. You see what he's saying? Instead of that horrible stuff that will pollute and damage your soul and therefore lead to all the streams of your life being infected with that filth, with that pollution, instead of letting that into your heart, let the words of God into your heart.

Let these actually come to be kept in your heart. That's what he's saying there, isn't it? In verse 21. Keep them within your heart. My words. The words of truth. The purifying word of God.

The pure word of God. And as you keep God's word in your heart, so that's one of the ways in which you guard your heart. In which you look after your life.

That's the first thing. Watch what you let into it. Secondly, you guard your heart by giving it proper exercise. Doctors tell us, and something perhaps we're not, certainly I'm not, as good at taking the advice as I should, but for our physical heart, the heart and our bodies, we should be getting regular exercise.

And ministers are probably the worst at not getting regular exercise. But for our hearts, you need regular exercise to keep it in a proper state.

[ 23 : 13 ] It's good for your heart to have. Regular exercise. But so also for your soul. You have to give your soul the regular exercise it needs. What do I mean by regular exercise for your soul?

Well, like what you're doing today. Worship. That's the outlet from your heart that you're now engaged in. You're engaging in the outlet of what you're exercising your heart in worship.

And there's nothing more important. There's no more important exercise for your heart, for your spiritual heart, than worship. You know, that's why it's great to see you young folks here today at a service of public worship.

Of course, we worship God on our own. We read the Bible on our own. We can pray on our own and hope we do that. But it's also so, so important not to neglect, as the Bible itself says, the gathering of ourselves together.

A writer to the Hebrews said that. It had begun in his day. He knew of a tendency not to do that. That's why he said, as it's the custom of some to neglect this.

[ 24 : 19 ] He's saying, don't neglect the assembling of yourselves together as is the custom of some. Let your heart have the exercise of worship.

Worship with God's people. Worship not just on Sundays, but weekdays as well. That regular exercise is good for your soul.

It's good for your heart. It's important. It's vital for its condition. And the contrast there is in verse 24. Put away from you crooked speech. Put devious talk far from you.

That's the opposite of worship. The opposite of letting from your heart that stream of worship flow out to God. What he's saying there is the opposite to that is crooked speech, devious talk, sinful language.

The opposite of worship which praises God. Exercise your hearts frequently in the worship of God. And remember Paul in Colossians.

[ 25 : 25 ] He was pointing out the importance of our relationship to people outside of the church because that for Paul and for ourselves is very important.

In Colossians 4 verses 5 and 6 he said, Conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may

know how you ought to answer each person.

For those people who don't read the Bible, they read the lives of Christians. They read the language of Christians. They read the habits of Christians.

They read the situations in life of Christians. And that's where you and I in keeping our heart from which flow the springs of life, it's important that other people see us as being true to God.

Which is why he's saying, Don't swerve to the right or to the left. Keep a straight path as far as God's truth and pleasing God is concerned.

[ 26 : 35 ] And you'll notice he's saying, Keep your heart with all vigilance. Now that's the language of security guards. Security guards have an important job.

It doesn't matter if they're looking after a box they pick up from the bank full of money or whether there's security guards in place to keep a place secure from others entering into it.

Security guards must be vigilant. They must be always diligent to look out for the threat and for the person who would take what is valuable that belongs to others.

And that's why he's saying here, Ponder it, your heart, but keep it with all vigilance. Make sure that you're being diligent, watchful, careful in looking after your heart.

Don't actually go astray in the way of following others. And as you go through these chapters, in the book of Proverbs, they're very easy chapters to read, which is why they're good for young folks to read them.

[ 27 : 44 ] It's just because they're in the Old Testament and because some of the bits maybe aren't all that easy to understand. They're really, really important. And in fact, it used to be the case in the older days that children were taught to read by reading the book of Proverbs.

And the idea behind this is that when they were reading in order to learn to read English, whatever language it was, they were learning wisdom at the same time. And that's for you young people so important.

So, keep your heart with all diligence for from it flow the streams of life.

May God bless his word to us. Let's conclude our service now. We're singing in conclusion in Psalm 119. Psalm 119 this time on page 159 and at verse 33.

Sing these four verses to verse 40. Teach me to follow your decrees. Then I will keep them to the end. Give insight and I'll keep your law with all my heart to it attend.

[ 28 : 56 ] Lead me in your commandments path for there, O Lord, delight I find. Incline my heart towards your laws from selfish gain. Preserve my mind.

O turn my eyes from worthless things. Give life according to your word. To me, your servant, keep your pledge so that you may be feared, O Lord. Remove from me the shame I dread.

Your laws excel in uprightness. O how I long for your decrees. Preserve me in your righteousness. These words, teach me to follow your decrees.

it may to follow your decrees, then I will keep them to the end, till of your place.

or at then lead me in your commandments path for there O Lord delight I find in flying your heart towards your law from selfish care may sell my mind O turn my eyes from worthless things give life according to your word to to leave your servant keep your rest so that you may be feared

[ 31 : 17 ] O Lord will in your righteousness.

I want to thank all the young folks for the way in which they listen so well during the service today. And it's always a pleasure to see them. But it's always good to see you as well giving attention as you have done to the Word of God as it's being preached.

So I want to thank you for that as well. Although it's the duty of all of us, whatever our age is. But nevertheless, it's good to be able to see that. I'll go to the side door here after the benediction.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen.