

Proverbs 4:20-27 — “Vigilantly Watch Over Your Heart!”*Introduction:*

Proverbs 4 is full of **urgency!** Solomon says: Son, you must guard your heart! Be awake, on alert, a watchman, no sleeping, no laziness, don't leave the door unlocked & cracked; Let no intruder, no enemy, and let no sin in!

Proverbs 4:23 - guard your heart!

John Kitchen said: If there was one verse I could give to ALL Christian young people, it would be this one. Nothing is more essential than guarding your heart!

- The **COMMAND** - watch over (ESV: keep; NIV: guard)
- The **CENTERPOINT/COCKPIT/CONTROL CENTER** - your heart (how you think, your thoughts).
 - The heart refers to your thoughts, desires, longings, cravings, beliefs, mindset, motivations, intentions.
 - It's the most comprehensive term in the Bible to describe the 'inner man' (not the physical organ) - but the internal being: plans, thoughts, desires, motivations, mindset, beliefs, choices all begin in the *heart*.
 - Quite simply: the heart is the control center of man. For as a man “thinks in his heart” so is he (Prov 23.7)

Heart in Scripture is used in various ways. Sometimes it means our reason or understanding, sometimes our affections and emotion, and sometimes our will. Generally it denotes the whole soul of man and all its faculties, not individually, but as they all work together in doing good or evil. The mind as it reasons, discerns, and judges; the emotions as they like or dislike; the conscience as it determines and warns; and the will as it chooses or refuses - are all together called the heart. (Jerry Bridges)

All you think, decide, plan, do and say flows like streams from one common source = the heart (Jay Adams)

- The **CAREFULNESS** - with all diligence (NLT: above all else; ESV: all vigilance; KJV; all diligence; ISV- above everything else)

Guard your heart **DILIGENTLY**
 Guard your heart **DAILY**
 Guard your heart **PROACTIVELY**
 Guard your heart **DISCERNINGLY**
 Guard your heart **SERIOUSLY**
 Guard your heart **EXPECTANTLY**

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- The **CONSEQUENCES** - reason? from it from the springs of life (KJV: the issues of life; another translation: ‘your life is shaped by your thoughts’)

Another context of clear teaching on the “heart of man” (Matthew 15)

A. False, **heartless** Worship (vv1-9) (what is HEARTLESS worship)

B. *instruction on the heart* = v.10-20 (*what is the HEART*)

A. Fervent, **heartfelt** Worship (v.21-28) (what is HEART-FELT worship)

Puritan Richard Baxter pleaded: *See that your chief study be about your **heart**, that there God’s image may be planted, and His glory advanced, the world & the flesh mortified, the love of every sin cast out, and the love of holiness pursued.*

THESIS — Watch over your heart with all diligence! The context will provide you 4 ways to guard your heart & what it looks like to guard your heart so you don’t fall into sin.

I. PRIORITIZE YOUR BIBLE! (20-22)

II. GUARD YOUR MOUTH! (24)

III. PROTECT YOUR EYES! (25)

“Your eye, then, is the shortest way into your heart. Watch it well, therefore; suspect and challenge all outsiders who come near it. Keep the passes that lead to your heart with all diligence.” (Alexander Whyte)

IV. WATCH YOUR PATH! (26-27)

Today our culture tells us...

Follow your heart /// Do what you wanna do /// Be who you wanna be /// Express/Identify yourself as you please /// Pursue your own potential /// Do whatever feels right/good /// Follow your feelings /// Express the inner you! // Believe your heart!

A New Testament example of a battle plan. THE BATTLE PLAN to guard your heart (**Philippians 4**)

1. Rejoice in God (v.4-5)
 2. Living by Prayer (6-7)
 3. Dwelling on Truth (v.8)
 4. Live by Scripture (v.9)
- >> then the peace of GOD will guard your HEART (v.7, 9b)

Concluding prayers!

- ❖ Unite my heart to fear your Name (Ps 86.11)
- ❖ With all my heart I have sought you (Ps 119.10)
- ❖ Incline my heart to your Word (Ps 119.36)
- ❖ Do not incline my heart to any evil thing (Ps 141.4)
- ❖ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight (Ps 19.14)

Other Scriptures that Show the Urgency & Necessity of Guarding Your Heart:

1. don't let it become proud (Deut 8.14)
2. Don't hate your brother in your heart (Lev 19.17)
3. Love God with all your heart (Deut 6.5)
4. God wants HEART circumcision/change (Deut 10.16)
5. Impress God's Word on your heart (Deut 11.18)
6. Repent/return to the LORD with all your heart (1 Sam 7.3)
7. Watch your friends as they may turn your heart away from God (1 Kings 11.2)
8. your heart can take courage (Ps 27.14)
9. Pour out your heart before God in prayer (Ps 62.8)
10. Don't set your heart upon money (Ps 62.10)
11. Your heart is revived by Seeking God (Ps 69.32)
12. Don't let your heart envy sinners (Prov 23.17)
13. Don't let your hear become angry (Eccl 7.9)
14. Guard your heart from selfish, dishonest gain (Jer.22.17)
15. Your heart follows where your money goes (Luke 12.34)
16. Don't let your heart be troubled but believe God (John 14.27)
17. You must believe in your heart in Christ raised up (Rom 10.9)
18. We must sing to the LORD in our hearts (EPH 5.19)
19. Guard from selfish ambition in your heart (James 3.14)
20. We must do all work/employment out of sincerity in the heart (EPH 6.5)

PRACTICAL WAYS TO GUARD YOUR HEART (from Phil Johnson)

- (1) Surrender your heart to Christ, which clearly implies first we must be born again, a new creature in Christ (2Co 5:17). But even then, we are to present ourselves to God living sacrifices, doing so as an act of worship (Ro 12:1-note). If you lack a regenerate heart (Ezek 11:19, 20, 18:31, 36:26, 27), your heart is not worth guarding (cp Je 17:9).
- (2) Mortify or put to death evil thoughts (Col 3:5-note, cp mortifying evil deeds in Ro 8:13-note), choking the life out of them and not then making provision for them again (Ro 13:14-note)
- (3) Put restraints on your heart that will keep you from entertaining iniquity in your thought life. Abstain from every form of evil that seeks to pollute your mind. As Paul said to Timothy, "Discipline yourselves for godliness" (1Ti 4:7, 8-notes). Instead of getting your audiovisual input from the world, seek it in the Word, and especially in the Wisdom in the Word...

My son, give attention (command, in the Greek the present imperative calling for this to be our continual activity) to my words. Incline (again a command to do this continually) your ear to my sayings. 21 Do not let them depart from your sight. Keep (idea is to guard and this verb is again a command to do this continually) them in the midst (the center) of your heart. 22 For they are life to those who find them, and health (and healing, including the idea of restoration, renewal or cure, cp same word in Mal 4:2) to all their whole body. (Pr 4:20, 21, 22)

Application: What do you watch or listen to when no one else is around?

- (4) Guard your conscience - When the sage here encourages us to guard our hearts, he is, in effect, urging us to keep a healthy and active conscience. He's saying we should cultivate a mind and a conscience that are informed by the Word of God. In fact, I don't need to say much about this; it's self-evident. Don't let the voice of God's wisdom be silenced in your own heart by the hardening of your conscience.

- (5) Guard your feet (Pr 4:26, 27) - Stay away from places where temptation assaults you.

- (6) Exercise watchful, cautious self-control over your emotions. Don't let your emotions drive or control your mind, but vice versa. Emotions are good, but in their place, just like your arms are good, but they're not for walking. Your nose is good, but it's not very good for driving nails. In the same way, your emotions are good, but they're not for thinking. Scripture condemns the person who thinks with his emotions. Jas 3:14,15 refers to that kind of thinking as "sensual wisdom": wisdom driven by the senses, thinking that is driven by the emotions.

Richard Baxter said "Keep (Cast) out all inordinate passions (referring to emotions), for passions violently press the thoughts and forcibly carry them away. If anger or grief or pleasure be allowed in, they will command your thoughts." As someone has written "Emotions are like screaming kids. Until you calm them down, you can't be heard. If you want to get rid of your bad thoughts, control your emotions." That's good advice.

- (7) Control your thoughts. This is the whole point, and this is the area where the virtue of self-control is most important. This is the one area where your battle for self-control will be won or lost: your thought life. If you willingly and deliberately allow yourself to indulge in evil thoughts or wicked fantasies, what this verse says is you're filling the wellspring of your life with poison—and nothing is more self-destructive! "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." We're talking about spiritual warfare this morning. This is classic warfare issue, right? I mean, we've got this reservoir up here that feeds water to most of the San Fernando Valley... And you realize, don't you, that since the terrorist situation has become such a problem, that thing is guarded carefully, constantly! Because it's a great danger if anyone would poison that reservoir.

A W Pink has an entire chapter entitled Heart Work

The keeping of the heart with all diligence is the great task which God has assigned unto each of His children. But oh, how sadly is the heart neglected! Of all their concerns and possessions, the least diligence is used by the vast majority of professing Christians in the keeping of their hearts. As long as they safeguard their other interests—their reputations, their bodies, their positions in the world—the heart may be left to take its own course.

As the heart in our physical body is the center and fountain of life, because from it blood circulates into every part, conveying with it either health or disease, so it is with us spiritually. If our heart be the residence of impiety, pride, avarice, malice, impure lusts, then the whole current of our lives will largely be tainted with these vices. If they are admitted there and prevail for a season, then our character and conduct will be proportionately affected. Therefore the citadel of the heart needs above all things to be well guarded, that it may not be seized by those numerous and watchful assailants which are ever attacking it. This spring needs to be well protected that its waters be not poisoned. The man is what his heart is. If this be dead to God, then nothing in him is alive. If this be right with God, all will be right. As the mainspring of a watch sets all its wheels and parts in motion, so as a man "thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Pr 23:7). If the heart be right, the actions will be. As a man's heart is, such is his state now and will be hereafter: if it be regenerated and sanctified there will be a life of faith and holiness in this world, and everlasting life will be enjoyed in the world to come. Therefore,

"Rather look to the cleansing of thine heart, than to the cleansing of thy well; rather look to the feeding of thine heart, than to the feeding of thy flock; rather look to the defending of thine heart, than to the defending of thine house; rather look to the keeping of thine heart, than to the keeping of thy money" (Peter Moffat, 1570).

"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for Out of it are the issues of life" (Pr 4:23). The "heart" is here put for our whole inner being, the "hidden man of the heart" (1Pe 3:4). It is that which controls and gives character to all that we do. To "keep"—garrison or guard—the heart or soul is the great work which God has assigned us: the enablement is His, but the duty is ours. We are to keep the imagination from vanity, the understanding from error, the will from perverseness, the conscience clear of guilt, the affections from being inordinate and set on evil objects, the mind from being employed on worthless or vile subjects; the whole from being possessed by Satan. This is the work to which God has called us.

Rightly did the Puritan John Flavel say,

"The keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition is the great business of a Christian's life."

Now to "keep" the heart right implies that it has been set right. Thus it was at regeneration, when it was given a new spiritual bent. True conversion is the heart turning from Satan's control to God's, from sin to holiness, from the world to Christ. To keep the heart right signifies the constant care and diligence of the renewed to preserve his soul in that holy frame to which grace has reduced it and daily strives to hold it.

"Hereupon do all events depend: the heart being kept, the whole course of our life here will be according to the mind of God, and the end of it will be the enjoyment of Him hereafter. This being neglected, life will be lost, both here as unto obedience, and hereafter as to glory" (John Owen in Causes of Apostasy).

Here is Pink's summary of what it means to keep the heart. The reader is advised to read the extended discussion that goes with each point by clicking here.

1. To "keep" the heart means striving to shut out from it all that is opposed to God...
2. To "keep" the heart means striving to bring it into conformity with the Word...
3. To "keep" the heart means to preserve it tender unto sin...
4. To "keep" the heart means to look diligently after its cleansing.

