

# Keep Watch Over Your Heart

Proverbs 4:23-27

## **Intro**

Once in a while I use to watch Steve Irwin, the Crocodile Hunter on TV. So many times I thought for sure he would be fatally bitten by a snake, crushed and killed by a crocodile, or mauled to death by some wild animal.

It was a shock and surprise to learn how he died. Steve Irwin though facing dangers daily made it a point to be extremely alert and guard his body from any surprise attacks by the animals.

The one area that he thought would not be vulnerable turned out to be the most vulnerable. It was not his limbs or head but his heart that was unprotected. The 44-year-old Irwin's heart was pierced by a sharp poisonous spine of a stingray, Sept. 4, 2006.

The Word of God instructs us to "*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*" In other words, guard your heart above all else for it impacts everything you do."

*"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."* (Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, physician and writer).

## **What is the Heart?**

It is not talking about the physical organ of the heart but is referring to the core of an individual, the intellect, emotions, will and the whole inner being of the person.

The Bible tells us that the heart is the seat of all affections and actions of life. Joe Stowell in his book, *Fan the Flame*, says that "The Heart is used in Scripture as the most comprehensive term for the authentic person. It is the part of our being where we desire, deliberate, and decide. It has been described as 'the place of conscious and decisive spiritual activity, the comprehensive term for a person as a whole; the feelings, desires, passions, thought, understanding and will, and the center of a person.' The place to which God turns." (J. Stowell, *Fan The Flame*, Moody, 1986, p. 13.)

Your heart is the "real" you – it's everything we mean when we describe the inner person. The heart encompasses mind, emotions and will. But the Bible doesn't only address our hearts' complexity – it tells us that it also has been compromised and broken.

## **Heart is affected by sin**

Hearts are broken because of the disease of sin. Jesus said in Matthew 15:19, "*For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.*" It's the heart which churns out murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and slander etc.

In the Old Testament Jeremiah wrote that "*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? "I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.*" (Jeremiah 17:9-10)

Jeremiah says, my heart is not just subverted by sin but it also has great capacity to deceive and be deceived. I can fool others. What's even more amazing, I can even fool myself.

When Scripture speaks of the heart, it also includes the mind, because the heart is where Scripture puts the seat of your thought life. Proverbs 23:7, "For as a man thinks in his heart, so *is* he..." So, what you

think about and how you think, the ideas you entertain in the privacy of your own imagination. That is the true barometer of your spiritual character. Your heart tells you who you really are.

In ancient times, you don't find people referring to the brain. For example, Psalm 14:1 says, *"The fool says in his heart, 'there is no God'...."* It doesn't say, "The fool says in his brain," does it? Why? Because the heart is the centre of thought.

One of the key verses in the New Testament is Mark 7:20-23, where Jesus said this, *"What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' 21 For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"*

He was answering people who had charged His disciples eating with unwashed hands, and He was saying, you know, "It's not what goes into you that defiles you, but what comes out of your heart."

### **You are What Your Heart is**

Proverbs 27:19 says, *"As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man."* That is why God says he looks at the heart not the external appearance.

In 1 Samuel 16:7 we read about the prophet Samuel looking for David as the next king of Israel. We read, *"But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'"*

**Proverbs 4:23** *"Above all else, keep watch over your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."*

What it's saying is this: your heart is like a reservoir and what comes out of it is what determines the quality and the character of your spiritual life. If your heart is defiled, it will have consequences in your behavior, your speech, your attitudes, and every area of life. The heart is the wellspring of life itself, and if you pollute the fountain, you defile all of life. It's vital to understand that.

Protecting your heart is of the highest priority. The writer says *"Above all else."* The original language is literally, above all keeping, keep your heart. Above everything else you might value – value enough to take care of and post guard over your heart. This ought to be at the top of the priority list because of the vast consequences.

The most obvious reason for that top-of-the-list priority is that you have no other resource like your heart - in nature or capacity or impact of influence.

Our heart is the most intimate and the most real part of who we are. It's at the core of our being, the real component of who and what we are. It sets our attitudes, drives our motives, determines our mind-set, houses our convictions and steers our emotions - all of those and more are governed and stirred by the source that is our heart.

The heart is also where God's Spirit dwells if you're a Christian. As such it's the place, down deep inside you, where that most vital of determinations are made: whether you will walk with God, or not. Whether God will sit enthroned in His rightful place, or whether some other will.

## **5 CONDITIONS OF THE HEART**

### **1/ Hardening of the Arteries (Hard heart)**

In Hebrews 4:7 it says, *"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."*

Our hearts can be hardened and cold towards God and the things of God.

### Example: Experience with noise

When my cousin Walter and I were in our third year at Bible College in Toronto we found an apartment next to the 401 highway. We wondered why the apartment rent was so cheap—and we found out the first night. The traffic on the 401 was loud even in the middle of the night, a blasting horn once in awhile, heavy trucks and even emergency vehicles with their sirens. Every night there was constant noise.

At first we thought about changing apartments, but then we started getting used to the nightly disturbance. I would wake up for a few seconds then go right back to sleep. Eventually it got to where the traffic noise didn't even wake me up. I got use to it and couldn't hear it any more. I was hardened to the noise and tuned it out.

The same hardening process occurs when God speaks to our hearts and we don't respond. Eventually, we stop hearing His voice because our hearts have become hard.

Proverbs 28:14, *“Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble.”*

### **2/ Heart Murmur (Attitude of complaining)**

Philippians 2:14 *“Do everything without complaining or arguing.”*

A typical family was driving home from church one Sunday. Dad was fussing about the sermon being too long and sort of boring. Mom said she thought the organist played too loudly. Sis, who was a Music major in college, said she thought the soloist was a bit flat during most of her song. Grandma said she couldn't hear very well – since they were sitting toward the back. As they pulled in the driveway, their young son, who had listened to all of this, started to fuss about the woman who sat in front of him with that big hair-do. Then he paused, nudged his dad, and said, "But, Dad, you gotta admit, it was a pretty good show for a buck."

The problem with us humans is that we are so ready to complain and grumble about anything and everything. We are rarely ever satisfied with life. It's a terrible attitude to have and attitudes come from the heart. We often want everything handed to us on a silver platter and live a life of total leisure and comfort. When things don't go our way we complain. But notice in Scripture it says *“Do everything without complaining...”* Count your blessings and stop grumbling.

### **3/ Hypertension (Super sensitive emotions)**

Ephesians 4:31-32, *“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”*

Controlling your emotions is one of the hardest things to do. Emotions rarely initiate – they always respond and react. The heart thinks and the emotions respond. When somebody says, "I can't control my emotions," Their problem is not an emotional one, it's a mental one. The emotions are only responders to the initiation of the mind.

The key to controlling your emotions is to fill your mind and heart with divine truth – God's word. That's the key. The emotions respond to what the mind perceives as true – even if it isn't true!

### Example:

Have you ever awakened with a jolt after dreaming that you were falling off a high story building? Well, you weren't actually falling, but your mind perceived it as true and your emotions responded to it. That teaches us that we can't trust our emotions! The only way to control your emotions is to make sure that your mind is filled with God's truth. Emotions are like bad behaved children – they'll run amuck if you don't control them.

When people start putting emotions first, they really get into problems. Emotions should always respond to the truth and be controlled by the Holy Spirit. One of the fruits of the Spirit is “*gentleness and self-control.*” (Galatians 5:22).

#### **4/ Heart Blockage (Stubborn spirit)**

Psalm 81:11-12, “*But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices.*”

One blockage is **unbelief**, which is resistance to the voice of the Holy Spirit, and that is probably the worst sin against God. This makes our spiritual heart become calloused and resistant to the Holy Spirit.

Another blockage we read in Jeremiah 7:24, “*But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward.*”

God's people failed to incline their ears and hearts to hear and obey the clear Word of the Lord. As they did in those days so do we at times. At times we follow our own counsel or the wrong counsel of others. We stiffen our hearts in resistance to the authentic voice of the Holy Spirit and to live according to His will and ways.

So what is the answer? It is the same as it always has been – **repent** – to seek by God's grace, a moral reorientation of our hearts and souls. Also to genuinely listen to God's voice, obey His commands, inclining our ears and hearts to Him.

#### **5/ Enlarged Heart (Inflated ego)**

Proverbs 16:18, “*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*”

Sinful pride is giving glory to ourselves rather than to God for our gifts, abilities and accomplishments. The proud person seeks to be served rather than to serve. The proud person refuses to ask for help, because he/she wants to be able to say, “I did it all myself,” and take all the credit. Pride leads to blind rebellion, a refusal to accept the truth, and the self-justification and rationalization of our sins.

Pride is the hidden root of all other sins. It is deadly, first, because it crowds out God's life and love in us. Our ego becomes so inflated that there's no room left in our heart for anyone else, including God. Second, it is deadly because it leads to every other form of malice and selfishness: anger, envy, lust, gluttony, and greed.

### **Conclusion**

Examine your heart and take a look at what's in it, what's been coming out. Ask yourself: is it still held captive by old emotions, bad desires, and lies? Are you feeding from the garbage cans of popular culture? Would you break the wrong patterns today? Begin today directing your heart to Christ.

There's a wonderful verse in Scripture that teaches about our hearts being guarded – but not just by us. Philippians 4:7 says, “*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*”

Rather than leaving us to guard our hearts on our own strength, God has already provided that protection in Christ.

Do whatever it takes. But begin protecting the most complex and vital and far-reaching part of you. Draw close to God through Christ and give Him your heart for safekeeping. Make Him the Supreme object of your hearts affection and He will keep you. Give Him your heart.

***“Above all else, keep watch over your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Prov. 4:23).***