Guard Your Heart
Proverbs 4:23 (NKJV)

For our scripture text this evening I would like to read just one verse of scripture. It is found in Proverbs chapter four, verse 23.

Proverbs 4:23 (NKJV)   Keep your heart with all diligence, four out of it spring the issues of life.

P R A Y E R

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

I want to talk to you this evening about your heart.

When we think of our heart, we think about the physical organ that pumps blood throughout our body. But when the Bible speaks of the heart, rarely is it referring to the physical organ.

If you have the New King James Version, your Bible mentions the “heart” 926 times. The King James Version mentions the “heart” 963 times and the New American Standard 863 times.

It is obvious from this amount of references that “the heart” is a very important subject in the Bible. The term “heart” as it is used in the scriptures typically speaks about our whole “inner being.”

While God cares about our whole being, He is especially concerned about the condition of our heart.
Our scripture text says, “Keep your heart with all diligence.” What does that mean? To “keep” means “to GUARD.”

We are to guard our hearts with all diligence. Put guardrails around your heart! Put up blockades and barricades at the entrance to your heart. Your heart is the master-control center of your whole life. If your heart is wrong, your whole life will be wrong. If your heart is poisoned, your whole life will be poisoned.

In this one little proverb, Solomon is giving us one of the most important duties we have in the Christian life. All other duties pale in comparison to guarding our hearts, for our heart affects everything we are......everything we say...... and everything we do.

For the remainder of the message let's consider three truths about “the duty” of guarding our hearts.

TRUTH #1: Guarding The Heart Is A Challenging Duty (v.23a)

v. 23 a “Keep your heart with all diligence.”

ILLUSTRATION: Think of a time when you took your KIDS or GRANDKIDS to a crowded public place like THE BEACH.......or A MALL......or AN AMUSEMENT PARK. Did you just turn them loose to do as they pleased? NO! You probably watched over them like a hawk. You never let them out of your sight for one solitary minute. Perhaps you constantly held on to their hand or tethered them to you with one of those clip-on leashes. Chances are your eyes were constantly scanning back and forth across the crowd to make sure there were no unsavory looking characters lurking around who might abduct your child or grandchild.

1. Here's my point: Children need guarding don’t they? They don’t understand why they have to hold your hand. They don’t understand why they can’t just wander off and do whatever they want to do, because their young minds aren’t mature enough to sense the possible dangers around them. Guarding over your kids or grandkids all day long in a crowded public place is a very challenging duty isn’t it?

2. Likewise, keeping constant guard over our hearts is a very challenging duty.
3. Here are just three reasons why our hearts need constant guarding:

(A) First of all, our hearts need guarding because our human nature distorts our **view** of **Life**.

**Proverbs 19:3 (NKJV)** The foolishness of a man twists his way, and his heart frets against the LORD.

Our hearts are foolishly drawn towards the sinful things God has warned us about. The Bible is filled with “thou shalt not” commands. God didn’t give us those commands to take all the fun out of life, He gave those commands to protect us from sin’s dangers, miseries and sorrows. And yet our hearts are naturally drawn to those very things.

(B) Secondly, our hearts need guarding because we are prone to **wander** away from **God**. Just like a child is prone to wander away from his parents at a crowded mall or amusement park, our hearts are prone to wander from our heavenly Father.

**Isaiah 53:6a (NKJV)** All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way.

(C) Thirdly, our hearts need guarding because our heart is very **deceitful**.

**Jeremiah 17:9 (NKJV)** The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?

Have you ever said something like this: “My head is telling me one thing and my heart is telling me another?” Or has anyone ever told you, “Just follow where your heart leads? Sounds good doesn’t it? Actually it can be very dangerous to follow your heart because your heart often lies to you!”
ILLUSTRATION

Years ago I remember a young man in the Church where I was ministering was having marital troubles; and he told me “his heart” was leading him to another woman and he felt like “following his heart” was the right thing to do. That young man’s heart had deceived him into believing an adulterous relationship with another woman was the right thing to do. Following our heart is only right when our heart is in tune with God’s will.

4. You see, **GUARDING OUR HEARTS IS A CHALLENGING DUTY** because our hearts are naturally drawn to sinful things, and our hearts are very prone to wander from GOD, and our hearts are very deceitful and don’t always lead us in the right direction.

**TRUTH #2: Guarding The Heart Is A Constant Duty (v.23a)**

v.23a “Keep your hearts with all diligence.”

1. That word diligence means to give something constant **CARE** or **ATTENTION**.

2. When Solomon says “keep your heart or guard your heart with all diligence” he is alerting us to the fact that you and I are living in a combat zone every single day-----one in which there are many casualties.

3. Many of us are oblivious to the truth of just how much Satan is bent on destroying us. Satan never takes a holiday or a vacation or even a day off.

   Every single day he tries to attack our heart with discouragement or disappointment or defeat or depression or despair.

   Every single day Satan baits his hooks and sets his traps trying to lure our heart into sin. He has placed “sinful land mines” everywhere to destroy our Christian witness, our reputations, our marriages, our children, and our happiness.
4. This is why we can’t let down our guard. We must constantly guard our hearts every day for the rest of our earthly lives. There is no time or circumstance where you and I have the liberty to go “off duty” when it comes to guarding our hearts.

5. Do you remember that account in EXODUS 17 where the Israelites were engaged in a battle with their arch-enemy, the Amalekites? Do you remember as long as Moses held the staff above his head the Israelites were winning the battle. But when Moses grew tired and lowered his arms, the enemy would start winning. And so he had Aaron get on one side and Hur on the other to support his arms so the Israelites could be victorious in battle.

6. Do you know when you and I stay in the word of God and pray regularly, and daily examine our hearts we can win our battles with Satan. But when we “let down our guard,” when we stop reading our Bibles, when we stop praying as we should, when we stop examining our actions and motives, Satan starts winning the battle over us.

**GUARDING THE HEART IS A CHALLENGING DUTY.**

**GUARDING THE HEART IS A CONSTANT DUTY.**

**TRUTH #3:** Guarding The Heart Is A Critically Important Duty

1. Why should “guarding our hearts” be a top priority in our daily lives?

   Solomon tells us in the latter part of verse 23....... He says, “Keep your heart (guard your heart) with all diligence. (WHY???) For out of it spring the issues of life.

   Some translations say, “For the heart is the well-spring of life.”
2. Now what does that mean? It means our lives will never be any better than the CONDITION of our HEART.

   We know that is certainly true in a physical sense, don't we? When someone has a serious heart condition it greatly limits what they can and cannot do.

   The same applies to the spiritual condition of our heart.

3. The late Arthur W. Pink compared the heart to the warehouse and our eyes, our hands, our tongue and our feet to the shops that distribute what's in the warehouse of our heart.

4. Let's consider FIVE KEY AREAS of our lives that come from the “well-spring” of our heart.

   (A) The heart is the “well-spring” of our THOUGHTS.

      PROVERBS 23:7 (NKJV)  “For as a man THINKS in his HEART, so is he.”

      In MATTHEW 9:4 (NKJV) Jesus asked, “Why do you THINK evil in your hearts?”

      In MATTHEW 15:19 (NKJV) Jesus said, “For out of the HEART proceed evil thoughts.”

   You see, we think thoughts proceed from the mind. But actually our thoughts proceed from the well-spring of our heart. Dirty thoughts proceed from a dirty heart. Evil thoughts proceed from an evil heart. If your “mind is in the gutter” it is because your heart is in the gutter. The mind and the heart are inseparable.

   Do you know if you have a rotten attitude, you don't have a mental problem, you have a heart problem. A rotten attitude is a warning sign your heart is poisoned with negativity and pessimism and doubt and cynicism.

   Our thoughts don’t just come to us out of nowhere. If you have lustful thoughts its because there is lust inside your heart. If you have hateful thoughts it is because there is hate inside your heart. If you have proud thoughts it is because there is pride in your heart.
Because our thought life is directly connected to our heart it is critically important that we guard the things we watch, the things we read, the things we listen to and the things we dwell upon.

(B) The heart is the well-spring of our WILL.

God created us with a free will. In other words, God allows us the freedom to make choices and decisions in our lives. But do you know your choices and decisions reflect the condition of your heart?

We may say we believe in GOD and that we truly love GOD but do you know our choice of habits, our choice of behavior, our choice of priorities, our choice of friends and our choice of lifestyle, will reveal the true condition of our heart?

This is another reason it is critically important that we guard what goes into our heart.

(C) The heart is also the well-spring of our FEELINGS and EMOTIONS.

PROVERBS 14:13 (NKJV)  “Even in laughter the HEART may sorrow.”

God created each of us with feelings and emotions. And our feelings and emotions often have a tremendous impact on the choices and decisions we make.

Think about those times when someone asked you to do something and “your heart just wasn’t in it.” You probably didn’t give it your best effort did you? You probably didn’t stick with it very long did you?
The greatest of all the commandments has to do with our feelings towards God. Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-39:

“You shall LOVE the LORD your GOD with all your HEART, with all your SOUL, and with all your MIND. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

You see it is critically important that we guard our hearts, because if we don't our love and passion for GOD will be dampened by love and passion for worldly things.

(D) The heart is also the well-spring of our CONSCIENCE.

When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:37 says “Many of those who heard him were cut to the heart.” In other words they felt guilty. Their conscience bothered them so much that they repented and were baptized into Christ that very day.

One reason why it is critically important that we guard our hearts is because if we allow our hearts to be filled with worldliness and sinfulness our conscience can become “seared” or “hardened” to the point we can sin and no longer feel any guilt or shame.” And when our conscience becomes seared we can reach a point where we no longer respond to the Holy Spirit's leading and direction in our lives.

(E) The heart is also the well-spring of our WORDS.

LUKE 6:45b (NKJV) “For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.”

You and I may be able to hide our true feelings about someone or something for a time, but sooner or later our words are going to reveal what is in our heart.

ILLUSTRATION: Years ago I knew a man who was always syrupy sweet and kind to my face, but I always sensed he was hiding the true feelings of his heart towards me. Then one day my suspicions were confirmed. I received a phone call from a friend who just happened to be in the Slatestone grocery on Slateston Road (Washington) when this “brother-in-Christ” was there eating his lunch. He said, “He was bad-mouthing you and telling everybody in the diner how he couldn't stand you.”
Well the next time I saw this “brother-in-Christ” do you think I was listening to his “syrupy words” or thinking about what he really felt in his heart?

5. Do you understand now why GUARDING OUR HEART IS SO CRITICALLY IMPORTANT? Our heart is the well-spring of everything in our life: our thoughts.....our will....our feelings and emotions......our conscience......and our words. EVERYTHING!

CONCLUSION

In closing let me leave you with this thought. Think of how diligent we are to guard and protect our homes. We put dead-bolt locks on the doors. We put security lights out in the yard. We make sure the windows are locked. We may store important documents or cash in a secure vault. Some of you may have a security alarm system or a guard dog. Why do we go to such great lengths? Because we don’t want anything to get inside our home that could harm us.

As Christians we should exercise the same due diligence about GUARDING OUR HEARTS. Because the mind, the eyes and the ears are “portals” to our heart, we must carefully guard what we think about.......what we watch or look at.......and what we listen to. We must realize that anything we let get into our heart will have an effect upon our whole life.

(pick up Bible) “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.”