

**Proverbs 4:23 - Pastor Dave Sharpe, Christchurch Christian Centre  
19th August 2018, am**

On the 11th of September 2001 I was quietly working in my job designing websites, when I received a text message from a friend. A plane had flown into one of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York. We switched on the radio in the office to listen to the news reports coming in. Another plane into the other tower. Including the hijackers, 2,977 people were killed that day.

Since then we've seen a massive rise in terrorism and attempts at terrorism - along with the increase of terror related activities has come an increase in security. It used to be that you would have to go a major airport to see the effect terrorism has had on security measures, but now at any large-scale event security is ramped up. And to some extent it's working. We're told that in 2017 nine terrorist attacks were prevented by MI5.

As a society we are highly guarded and alert to terrorism.

I wonder what you guard or protect in your life. Perhaps your car or your home has an alarm fitted to guard against thieves. You can get all kinds of insurance to protect property, health, life, body parts - the list goes on a long time.

But if we fail at protecting one particular area of our lives, this failure will result in every other area of our life being affected. More personal and eternal loss has been suffered by neglecting this one thing more than any other precious item.

I am talking about the heart. Not our physical heart, but our spiritual heart.

Proverbs 4:23

ESV Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

NAB: With closest custody, guard your heart, for in it are the sources of life.

NIV: Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

Knox: Use all thy watchfulness to keep thy heart true; that is the fountain whence life springs.

Title of this message: Keeper of the Heart

The heart of any human being is incredibly important because the heart is the seat of our mind, intellect, emotions and our will. The heart is like our control centre. So

if we have allowed our heart to become unhealthy, our minds, thoughts, emotions are affected, and we end up making bad decisions that could ruin our lives. However if we guard our heart, if we keep it with all vigilance, as Proverbs 4:23 encourages us to, we can experience the life of God flowing in, through and out of us.

This is what we as Christians should all be experiencing, because we have been given new hearts.

Ezekiel 36:25–27

God is speaking to his people through Ezekiel the prophet.

[25] I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. [26] And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. [27] And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (ESV)

Here God is talking about what he is going to do ultimately through Jesus. When somebody receives Jesus, God gives them a new heart - a heart of flesh.

Following God is not primarily about what we do. Following God is most importantly about who we are on the inside, and who we are becoming.

Being a Christian is not about keeping up appearances to other people - because we're reminded that "man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

Being a Christian is primarily a heart matter. Heart transformation. Heart keeping. You can say all the right stuff, you can do all the right stuff, you can appear to others as holy as the Archbishop of Canterbury on Easter Sunday - but if you don't have a heart of flesh, it's all worthless.

If someone isn't a Christian, the Bible says they have a heart of stone, in that they are spiritually dead. A heart of stone can't produce anything of God. because it is dead to God.

But when God saves a person, he gives them a new heart - a heart of flesh; and he puts his Holy Spirit within that person. And as we see in Ezekiel, it is from that point

where obedience flows. It is only possible to obey God out of a transformed heart of flesh, because obedience to God is all about relationship with God.

In the gospel of Mark, Jesus describes for us what a person looks like with a heart of stone.

Mark 7:21–23

[21] For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, [22] coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. [23] All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” (ESV)

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus shows us the difference between someone with a heart of flesh and a heart of stone.

Luke 6:45

[45] The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. (ESV)

The good person is not a good person because of what they do. The good person is a good person because they have good treasure in their heart. Jesus has given them a heart of flesh - a good heart - and now because their heart has been made good, good things come out of it.

Likewise, the evil person is evil simply because their heart is of stone, and is capable of nothing good.

It's like the heart is a reservoir, and what is in the reservoir dictates what kind of life flows from it. (picture - reservoir in Missouri)

With our old hearts of stone, before God caused us to be born again, the life that flowed from it was impure, but then when we got saved, something miraculous happened.

God gave us a new heart, and something different started to flow from our heart.

“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”

There are two Greek words for life in the New Testament - Bios (biology) - which is what everyone has - whether they're saved or not.

Zoe - which is the life of God. When we read the phrase eternal life, the life is zoe - God's life. Supernatural life. Life that never ends. If you're saved this morning, you have Zoe life - you have eternal, supernatural life, and you have it right now.

And the Bible tells us that from our heart flow the springs of life - the springs of Zoe - God's eternal supernatural flows from the persons heart who is born again - - Now Proverbs is not in the New Testament, it's in the Old Testament, so it wasn't written in Greek, it was written in Hebrew. But we do have the Septuagint, which is the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, and Life is there translated as ZOE.

But, it doesn't automatically follow that because we've got heart of flesh, a new, good heart, that good things will always come out of it.

An elderly, quiet forest dweller once lived high above an Austrian village along the eastern slopes of the Alps. Many years ago, the town council had hired this old gentleman as Keeper of the Spring to maintain the purity of the pools of water in the mountain crevices. The overflow from these pools ran down the mountainside and fed the lovely spring that flowed through the town.

Faithfully, silently and regularly, the Keeper of the Spring patrolled the hills, removed the leaves and branches from the pools, and wiped away the silt that would otherwise choke and contaminate the fresh flow of water.

Afeter a while, the village became a popular attraction for holiday-makers. Swans floated along the crystal-clear spring, the mill wheels of various businesses near the water turned day and night, farmlands were naturally irrigated, and the view from restaurants sparkled.

Years passed. One evening the town council met for its semiannual meeting. As the council members reviewed the budget, one man's eye caught the salary paid to the Keeper of the Spring. "Who is this old man?" he asked indignantly. "Why do we keep paying him year after year? No one ever sees him. For all we know, this man does us no good. He isn't necessary any longer!" By a unanimous vote, the council dispensed with the old man's services.

For several weeks nothing changed. But by early autumn, the trees began to shed their leaves. Small branches snapped off and fell into the pools, hindering the rushing flow of sparkling water. One afternoon in the spring, someone noticed a slight yellowish-brown tint to the water.

A few days later, the water had darkened even more. Within a week, a slimy film covered sections of the water along the banks, and a horrible smell was coming from the spring. The mill wheels moved slowly; some finally ground to a halt. Businesses that were located near the water closed. The swans migrated to fresher waters far away, and tourists no longer visited the town. Eventually, the disease and sickness reached deeply into the village.

The town council had enjoyed the beauty of the spring but underestimated the importance of guarding its source.

We can all too easily make the same mistake in our lives. Like the Keeper of the Spring who maintained the purity of the water, you and I are the Keepers of Our Hearts. We need to consistently evaluate the purity of our hearts in prayer, asking God to reveal the little things that contaminate us. As God reveals our wrong desires, wrong longings, wrong attitudes and wrong thoughts we must ask him to remove them from our hearts, and then WE must keep our hearts with all vigilance.

It was Socrates who said “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

It’s easy to not keep your heart. It’s easy, and often enjoyable, to do things that cause our hearts to get mucky, and thus contaminate our lives.

Failing to guard your heart always has bad consequences.

Two examples of unguarded hearts

Ananias and Sapphira

Acts 5:1–5

[1] But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, [2] and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. [3] But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? [4] While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.” [5] When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. (ESV)

(and then three hours later the same thing happens to his wife).

It wasn't a spontaneous decision or a sudden lapse in judgement that caused Ananias to lie. Peter discerned that Satan had "filled his heart" - Satan can not fill your heart or influence your heart if you are keeping guard over your heart. We don't know any other details about Ananias's life, but we know the most significant thing about him, that caused his downfall and his death - he wasn't keeping guard of his heart.

David and Bathsheba

2 Samuel 11:2-3

[2] It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. [3] And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" (ESV)

This appears a very different David to the one who is described as a "man after God's own heart". Something had happened to David's heart - we don't know exactly what was going on in his mind, but what we do know is that he wasn't keeping his heart with all vigilance, because he sees a woman bathing and he sends for her and sleeps with her and to coin a phrase, all hell breaks loose - and really it does - the enemy is all over this situation.

Men, you know it's not a sin to notice a beautiful woman. It's what happens next that is key. You have the choice to look again, or to set your thoughts on something else. David noticed, and David looked. He allowed lustful thoughts to take control of his heart, and he thought wrong thoughts, he made terrible decisions.

If your heart isn't kept clean, you are more likely to give in to temptation when it comes your way.

"Two men may face the same conditions; one falls, the other stands.

The difference is not in the temptation but in the heart of the man."

We know it's a heart issue with David - Later - prophet Nathan comes and rebukes David for what he's done

Psalm 51:10

[10] Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me. (ESV)

It is so important for us to be keeping our heart with all vigilance.

It can only have good consequences.

What goes on in the secret place of your heart really, really matters, because what goes on in your heart defines the kind of person you are and the kind of life you live.

You won't hear me quoting Joyce Meyer too often, but I love this from her: "One of the biggest revelations I've received from God is that my real life is the life that's in me."

Life is not your circumstances, the kind of house you live in, the kind of job you have or how much money you have. You can have the best of these things and still be miserable. On the other hand, it's amazing how happy and peaceful you can be in the middle of the lousiest circumstances, including the turmoil that's going on in the world today, if you keep your heart in the right condition."

You can't control what happens to you. But whatever happens to you, your heart is your responsibility. You are the keeper of your heart, and if you keep it with all vigilance, pure, clean, supernatural life will flow from it. If you allow it to get dirty, that will eventually contaminate every area of your life.

**KEEP YOUR HEART WITH ALL VIGILANCE FOR FROM IT FLOW THE SPRINGS OF LIFE**

John 7:38

[38] Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" (ESV)

Your heart is the source of supernatural life. Keep your heart pure and clean and you will experience the life of God flowing from it and affecting every area of your life.

You will have more peace. You will be able to hear God's voice through the Bible with more clarity. You will have a stronger sense of God being with you.

You will experience God using you more - because you will be naturally more available to him to use. When our hearts are kept clean and pure, we are more focussed on God - and he uses clean vessels.

Matthew 5:8 blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God

## Guard our heart - 3 ways from Philippians

### Philippians 4:4–8

[4] Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. [5] Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; [6] do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[8] Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (ESV)

### REJOICING IN GOD GUARDS OUR HEARTS

[4] Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

Rejoicing in God always focusses our minds on the goodness of God in all situations.

### THE PEACE OF GOD GUARDS OUR HEARTS

[6] do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Constantly giving anxieties to God - receive his peace.

His peace guards our hearts and our minds, his peace guards our thoughts.

### THINKING GOD THOUGHTS GUARDS OUR HEARTS

[8] Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (ESV)

Paul Montague - paraphrases this Prov 4:23 - “Be careful how you think, because your thinking results in actions that have either a positive or negative affect upon your territory (sphere of influence)”

Keeper of the springs.

What is the state of your spring? How clean is it? When is the last time we examined our hearts?

ask God to reveal the little things that contaminate us. As God reveals our wrong desires, wrong longings, wrong attitudes and wrong thoughts we must ask him to remove them from our hearts, and then WE must keep our hearts with all vigilance.

“The unexamined life is not worth living.”

Psalm 139:23–24

[23] Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!

[24] And see if there be any grievous way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting! (ESV)

Pray. Search me o God.