

Guard your Heart

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[0 : 00] Thank you David for that reading and it's lovely to be here at St Silas with you.

My name is Ian Ferguson. I am a Glaswegian and I am a former member of St Silas. Way back when most of you weren't even born. But when they had pews and when they had all other kind of furnishings in the building. But it's lovely to be here with you and to share in this service.

I also bring greetings to you from Bishop Andy Lines and I know that he is praying for you regularly. So we're going to be looking at the heart and before we do that I just wondered if any of you and this is rhetorical question I don't want you to put your hand up in any way but if any of you have ever had a heart attack.

I am one who has and it's not a pleasant experience but one of the things about the heart the actual muscle, the organ within our bodies is that you actually need to look after it and usually when the heart attack comes as it did me many years ago it's because I wasn't looking after the heart my heart in the way that I ought to have done.

[1 : 49] But yeah so that looking after your heart is so important but much more important is looking after your spiritual heart which is what we're going to look at in a moment.

So let's just pray to the Lord and ask Him to speak to us through His Word. Heavenly Father we ask you that through your Holy Spirit you will open up this Word to our hearts and that we may hear you speaking to us and in hearing you speaking to us we may also put into action those things that you call us to do.

Father, hear us open your Word to our hearts and open our hearts to your Word in Jesus' name Amen.

So Proverbs 4 verse 23 says this keep your heart with all vigilance for from it flows the springs of life.

In other translations it says keep your heart above all else guard it protect it look after it and that's what we're going to look at this morning.

[3 : 24] Many of the proverbs in the Bible many of the proverbs in this book are what we call stand alone verses which mean they can simply be read and understood just by reading the verse alone not needing too much context.

However in Proverbs 4 verse 23 this is not a stand alone verse it has context and the context is this when you look at the verse the very beginning of chapter 4 it's a father's wise instruction to his children it's a father's wise instruction to his children in verse 1 it says listen children to your father's instruction be attentive that you may gain insight in verse 10 of chapter 4 hear my child and accept my words that the years of your life may be many verse 20 the same chapter my child be attentive to my words incline your ear to my sayings verse 21 do not let them escape from your sight keep them within your heart verse 22 for they are life to those who find them and healing to all flesh so here we have a father's wise instructions to his children on a matter of great importance they are to listen to this father's instruction and they are to make sure they never lose sight of the words that are spoken to them and they are to store those words in their heart verse 23 he says keep your heart with all vigilance because from your heart springs life so he says above all else in other words above everything that you have heard from me this one thing is most important for you to remember forget everything else maybe that I have said keep this one thing make this one thing not just something that you might think of doing not just an option but for something that is crucial it's crucial for your life guard your heart the

Hebrew is actually quite difficult to translate it can be translated guard with all guarding your heart it's almost like guard your heart twice over three times over and that word guard in the Hebrew it's

used over 400 times in the Old Testament and its basic meaning is to watch over to care for you know to not lose sight of this important thing above all else put that double guard over your heart because from it flows the issues of life but before we even look at that we need to understand what is the heart mean or what did it mean for Solomon for the Hebrew writer the heart then meant much more than it does for us when we think of the heart we think of this organ this muscle that pumps the blood all around our cardiovascular system we also think of the heart as our emotions you know my heart fills up with love and adoration heart however when the

Bible uses the word heart it seldom ever refers to that muscle that organ that's pumping the blood around us to keep us alive the heart the Hebrew mind was you the real you inside your thoughts your wills your emotions your inner life everything about you this is you the heart not just this organ but who you really are the real you so the Hebrew Bible says that the heart is where we think where we make decisions it's all about the real you in fact if you were to look up some concordance like Strong's concordance I remember when I started as a theological student and they asked me to they would ask you to go and buy the

Strong's concordance if anybody has got one it's huge it's about that thick and it's very heavy it's a good door stopper actually put it by your door as I often did as a student forgive me but in that Strong's concordance it's got every word could possibly have in the Bible and in that Strong's concordance there is not a word for brain you will not find the word brain in that concordance the place where you think but you will find some 826 times the word heart and when you find a word that is as often mentioned then you know it's a huge word that means a great deal the heart the seat of our thoughts our feelings our intentions our decision making but of course we know that the bad news is that fundamentally our hearts are sinful our hearts have been broken through sin but the good news is that through Jesus

[10:17] Christ our hearts get changed the moment we place our faith in Jesus he gives us a new heart and so the wise father's instruction is very important for us with that heart the most important thing is to look after it watch over it because everything flows from it the Bible is very clear when it speaks about the human heart I the Lord says Jeremiah I the Lord search the heart and test the mind to give every man according to his ways according to the fruit of his deeds and when Adam fell and sinned against the Lord we all as a result inherited this sinful heart this deceitful and sick heart but

Jesus in his love and sacrifice on the cross brings us into a new place with a new heart we read in our reading from Mark chapter 7 what Jesus said about the heart and this is what he said in Mark 7 and verse 18 he says you are also without understanding because you do not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him since it enters not his heart but his stomach and is expelled what comes out of a person is what defiles him for from within out of the heart of man come evil thoughts sexual immorality theft murder adultery coveting wickedness deceitfulness sensuality envy slander pride foolishness all these evil things come from within and they defile a person so what

Jesus is saying is when you're looking at your heart you know you're not just looking at this organ you're looking at the real you inside and out of this heart comes these things and this heart needs to be changed and transformed and that is what Jesus comes to do for us as he washes our hearts clean through the shedding of his blood so we must guard this heart we must protect this heart we must watch over this heart of ours here is what the proverb says he says in verse 20 he says my son be attentive to my words incline your ear to my saying let them not escape your sight keep them within your heart for their life to those who find them and healing to all their flesh keep your heart with all vigilance for from it flow the springs of life and then he says this put away from you crooked speech so that's your tongue and put devious talk from you let your eyes look directly forward and your gaze be straight before 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 so here

Solomon is telling us some of the implications of watching over your heart you've got to watch you know about what's coming out of your mouth what comes out of your mouth comes from your heart the heart speaks the mouth speaks of what the heart is full of your eyes what are you looking at your heart will determine what you're looking at what are you looking at on those TV screens you've got to be very careful that your heart is full of God's word so that you discern what you should and you should not be watching ponder the way your feet go the path you take the decisions you make so it's all about this heart

Lord will you help me to guard my heart to watch over my heart now one of the things that it doesn't mean some people have thought to guard your heart means I protect my heart from being broken I protect my heart from being you know yeah just split maybe in a relationship where you say I'm going to protect my heart from being you know from that broken brokenness that could come in a relationship or I'm going to protect my heart from ever being hurt well this is crazy to love is to be vulnerable is to open up your heart he's not saying guard your heart you know push people away watch that you don't get hurt watch that it doesn't get broken listen it will get hurt and it will get broken welcome to the world welcome to the

[16 : 34] Christian life this is what C.S. Lewis said in his book *The Four Loves* about trying to protect your heart from being hurt he says this to love at all is to be vulnerable love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken if if you want to make sure of keeping your heart intact you must give it to no one not even an animal wrap it up avoid all entanglements lock it safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness and he goes on to say but in that casket safe dark motionless airless it will change it will not be broken it will become unbreakable impenetrable irredeemable for to love is to be vulnerable so what the proverb is saying is not you've got to protect your heart from being broken no he's saying you've got to guard your heart from what wants to come in and poison it and destroy it because it's the wellspring of life now the metaphor used here as a wellspring of life sees the heart as a reservoir filled to overflowing what is your heart overflowing with this morning what will it be overflowing with tomorrow guard that reservoir guard that heart from being poisoned you are guarding that well from contamination for it is because as we live in this world this toxic world that we live in there is that temptation that the heart will become hard that the heart will become poisoned the wise father says watch over your heart whatever you do my son whatever you do my daughter keep watch over your heart protect it the psalmist said didn't he in psalm 119 in verse 11 your word have

I hid where in my heart why that I might not sin against you we have to hide God's word or we have to fill our hearts with God's word and I know as you well know that Christians are having to deal with some toxic influences in our culture that would if we are not careful damage our hearts make them impure it is hard to protect it and guard it but we must do so the guarding of the heart the guarding of the heart against it becoming hard the proverb the proverb Hebrews 3 verse 8 to 15 says do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion looking at the time when the people of Israel hardened their hearts so don't let your heart become stubborn or hard it can easily become hardened remember those times when we see the terrible news of what's going on in all kinds of parts of the world and we see the poverty we see the famine we see the war it's easy for us to just harden our hearts because we see those pictures on the screen so often they become so familiar that our hearts no longer have that passion and feeling towards what is happening be careful that you do not harden your heart as the people of Israel did in those days when they turned away from God there was an old Puritan theologian in the 17th century his name was John Flavel and on this verse

Proverbs 4 and verse 23 he wrote 100 pages on this one verse 100 100 pages on this one verse you'll be glad to know my sermon doesn't have 100 pages but he uses a lovely illustration to help us understand the need to guard or to diligently watch our hearts he said this and I quote a gracious heart is like a musical instrument which though it be exactly tuned a small matter brings it out of tune again yea hand it aside but a little and it will need setting again before another lesson can be played upon it and he suggests there that each day we make sure we tune our hearts towards God because our hearts can so easily get out of tune with our business with all kinds of things with our distractions John Flavel lived in the 1600s and at that time strings on instruments were made of animal gut typically maybe from a sheep and these strings were very temperamental and prone to going out of tune and breaking once tuned as Flavel wrote it takes a small matter to bring it out of tune again the slightest change in temperature humidity or any other change in environment would undo the tuning if it gets knocked in transit it goes out of tune though capable of producing sweet sounding music gut strings were hard to manage they were moody and in constant need of care and retuning and he said this isn't our hearts just like that they so easily get out of tune somebody knocks us we're out of tune somebody says something to us oh we go out of tune something is happening in our hearts and it's true that our heart needs to be continually tuned to God each day that's how we understood our times of God during the day when we spent time in prayer and study of God's word maybe first thing in the morning or whenever it would be during the day this was a

tuning tuning our hearts to

[24 : 11] God as we entered the day and tuning our hearts to God throughout the day when things happen to us whatever our hearts are full of you know if our hearts are full of bitterness if our hearts are full of anger it will come out whatever is in there will come out it's like you know if I fill this glass to overflowing and I'm walking along and Simon comes along and he knocks me and whatever is in the glass spills out if I'm full of love Simon comes and knocks me I say no problem brother I love you if I'm full of something else and Simon knocks me I'm going to say something that I might regret it's what's inside that matters so we are tuning our hearts to ask

God that he might fill us with his love with his word and help us to protect and guard our hearts so in conclusion just three things why must we guard with all guarding our hearts one because your heart is so extremely valuable it's valuable you don't guard things that have no worth the last time I put my rubbish bin out for the dustman to collect I don't remind locking I don't remember locking it up in case someone came along and stole it but there are things that I do lock up because they are precious so your heart is valuable that's why you need to guard it because your heart is the source of everything you do it's the source of who you are so that's why you must guard it from it comes life in other words it's the source of your whole being your whole heart is overflowing in its thoughts words and actions so because it's the source of everything you do and thirdly guard your heart because your heart is always under attack when Solomon says to guard your heart he's implying that your heart is in a combat zone and it is and the enemy

Satan uses all kinds of weapons to attack our hearts things like disappointment discouragement disillusionment tempting to quit to walk off the field to surrender because he brings us low so you need to guard your heart because the enemy will attack it and does attack it and I can say as a church leader and I don't say this with any joy at all I say this with great sadness many church leaders that I know are no longer church leaders some no longer Christians and the reason because they didn't guard their hearts hearts they were so busy with doing everything else for the Lord and they forgot this and when you forget this listen it doesn't matter how many gifts you've got or theological degrees listen what you need to do more than anything else is to make sure you don't forget to guard your heart and when you're looking at the church when I go around churches and like the church that I led in Aberdeen there are tensions and there are challenges within the congregation within one another where we maybe fall out or we do things that either hurt others or we are hurt by them most of the troubles in fact all of the troubles that you will find in any community of Christians will always stem from people's hearts what was in their hearts whether it's unforgiveness whether it's bitterness all of this is all in the heart if we would only watch and guard our hearts to tune it each day tune it to

God's word keep checking your heart keep checking that it's full of Jesus and his word so I'm going to ask you to just for a moment how is your heart how is your heart today and be honest God knows your heart he knows it's full of the joys of the Lord joys of his word that's wonderful God knows the state of your heart at this moment he knows if it's broken he knows if it needs renewed he knows if your heart is sad your heart is troubled he knows that if your heart has made the wrong decisions and you're suffering from it and he says once again guard your heart and come to Jesus through his word to know that he is the one who heals the broken hearted who fills your heart with good things and who will help you to tune that heart each day to his word and to his love so we're asking

[30 : 53] Lord will you once again tune my heart to you this morning let's just bow our heads for a word of prayer we begin with that quiet moment so as we bring ourselves to the Lord we say Lord teach me how to align how to tune my heart each day to your word Lord help me to seek you with all my heart Lord

I bring to you the things in my heart that are causing me trouble concern or worry or worry father you want to take these things out of my heart and give me a new heart to refresh that heart with your love and father for those who this morning find that their hearts have been broken in some way whether it's in a relationship whether it's in something that has been done to them that's caused that pain father fill my heart with your forgiveness forgiveness and heal that brokenness within me that you have come to be my healer so above all else keep your heart with all diligence be vigilant over your heart for from it flow the springs of life amen