

A Heart of Worship

By Steve Pruitt

Millions of dollars are spent each year on programs and products to aid people in eating healthy and losing weight. Certainly these are necessary. Eating healthy and exercising is one way we can be good stewards of the bodies God has given us. However, in spending so much time and effort in guarding our bodies, I often wonder how much emphasis we put on guarding our spiritual lives.

King Solomon wrote, *Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.* (Proverbs 4:23 ESV) When we break down this verse in the Hebrew, we get more of an understanding about the thoughts of King Solomon. He seemed to be saying, “Guard your inner most being, your mind (thoughts), will and emotions as if they are prisoners. Guard them more fervently than you guard anything else. For out of your mind (thoughts), will and emotions flows what your life consists of.” (writer’s interpretation)

In guarding our hearts the same as we would a prisoner we are saying “Don’t let our hearts get away.” Since our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately sick (Jeremiah 17:9) and the intention of our hearts is evil from our youth (Genesis 8:21), we must bring all resources to bear in guarding their escape into the world. According to the National Instituted of Justice, among state prisoners released in 30 states in 2005, 67.8% were arrested for a new crime within three years and 76.6% were arrested within five years. When left unguarded a large number of parolees commit another crime and are re-arrested. If we leave our hearts unguarded the possibility of falling into sin is great because that is our nature.

When they were young, my wife and I told our girls, “Don’t give your heart away too fast. Be careful who you give your heart to.” When they would hug and kiss me I would tell them, “Save all your hugs and kisses for dad and the man you’re going to marry.” In the same way we should not give our hearts away to something that will cause it to be harmed or defiled. We are married to God (Revelation 19:7; 21:9), we are betrothed to one husband (2 Corinthians 11:2), and he has commanded us to serve him with all of our heart (Mark 12:30). Serving God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength is the heart beat of worship.

Solomon understood that guarding our hearts is of the utmost importance. He wrote, *As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man.* (Proverbs 27:19 ESV) Jesus concurred with Solomon when he said, *The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil. . .* (Luke 6:45 ESV)

When the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebub, Jesus replied, *You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.* (Matthew 12:34 ESV) After the Pharisees complained to Jesus about his disciples eating with defiled hands, Jesus called the people together and told them that what comes out of man defiles him not what is outside of him (Mark 7:14-16).

Jesus later explained to his disciples, *Do you 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? (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, 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, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.** All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.* (Mark 7:18-23 ESV)

The writer of Hebrews warned us, *Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.* (Hebrews 13:9 ESV) Jesus declared all foods clean in the sense that eating them will not defile our spirit. Eating pork and shrimp may elevate our cholesterol and health wise we might want to eat in moderation, but eating them will not defile our spirit; our spiritual heart. Evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit,

sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness defile us because these come from a defiled heart. Eating certain foods will not strengthen our spirit either. Our hearts are strengthened by grace.

Solomon continued in Proverbs 4 by saying, *Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you.* (Proverbs 4:24 ESV) James chimed in on the problem of our tongues when he wrote, *If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue **but deceives his heart**, this person's religion is worthless.* (James 1:26 ESV) It seems that what comes from our mouths is closely related to the condition of our hearts. Our hearts are deceived if we think otherwise.

Not only are our hearts reflective of what comes from our mouths but also what we set our eyes on; our desires. Jesus said, *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!* (Matthew 6:21-23 ESV)

Our treasure is not just our wealth it can be anything we value. The things we value are reflective of our hearts. John warned us, *For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.* (1 John 2:16 ESV) If we treasure or desire the things of the world they have our hearts and our bodies are full of darkness.

God has provided for us the means necessary to help guard our hearts and keep the light within us from becoming darkness. Some of those provisions include prayer, repentance, God's Word and accountability (relationships).

The Psalms contain many prayers to assist us such as: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.* (Psalms 19:14 ESV) *Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind.* (Psalms 26:2 ESV) *Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.* (Psalms 86:11 ESV) *Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!* (Psalms 139:23-24 ESV)

Repentance is necessary in keeping our hearts pure before God. The psalmists wrote, *If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.* (Psalms 66:18 ESV) *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.* (Psalms 51:10 ESV)

Meditating on, memorizing and obeying the Word of God are essential in guarding our hearts. Again we turn to the Psalms. *I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.* (Psalms 119:11 ESV) *The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.* (Psalms 19:8 ESV) King David said of the righteous man, *The law of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip.* (Psalms 37:31 ESV) One psalmist prayed, *Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.* (Psalms 119:34 ESV)

In his wisdom King Solomon wrote, *Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.* (Proverbs 27:17 ESV) Friends to which we can be accountable are of great value in the fight to guard our hearts. True friends love at all times (Proverbs 17:17) and the wounds they may inflict on us in holding us accountable are faithful (Proverbs 27:6). Solomon wrote, *Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel.* (Proverbs 27:9 ESV)

God searches our hearts and his word discerns the intentions of our hearts (Revelations 2:23; Hebrews 4:12). That is the reason Paul exhorted us to . . . *flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.* (2 Timothy 2:22 ESV) The writer of Hebrews warned us, *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.* (Hebrews 3:12 ESV)

Guarding our hearts seems like a daunting task, but it is necessary to having a heart of worship. However, there is hope in our efforts. John wrote, . . . *for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God.* . . . (1 John 3:20-21 ESV) Solomon wrote, *The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.* (Proverbs 16:9 ESV) It is God who works in us to both to will and work for his good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). God will fulfill his purpose for us (Psalms 138:8). He will equip us with strength and make our way blameless (Psalms 18:32).

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