

Shaping Holy Hearts, Guarding our Hearts,
Proverbs 4:23, Ephesians 6:13-18

Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life. Proverbs 4:23, CSB

We take our hearts for granted. We pay little attention to it when it's working correctly, and sometimes even when it's not. Taking a pulse is often nothing more than a way to assess the success of our workouts. It isn't until our heart is broken that we pay attention to what it needs.

Yet, our beating hearts keep us alive. Our pulse tells us how well our heart is working. Is it strong and steady? Is it faint, low, or high? It assesses our life source.

Today, we understand the nuances and vulnerabilities of the physical heart. It's the pump that powers our whole body. Its blood sends oxygen and nutrients to all parts of our bodies and carries unwanted carbon dioxide and waste products away.

When Proverbs 4:23 was written, people didn't understand the functions of the brain, liver, or kidneys. All they knew was the heart, its blood flow, and that they considered the essence of life to be associated with the heart. The ancient near east saw it as the center of intellect, emotion, will, and belief.

What we can take from that early concept is that just like the physical heart is the source of our physical life, the spiritual heart is the source of our spiritual life.

We guard our physical heart by eating healthy, exercising, and maybe taking some supplements or medication. If we don't take proper care of it, our heart might not work as well, and we face the possibility of high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke, and more.

Our spiritual heart is the essence of our relationship with God. It assesses our priorities, our compassion for others, and our faith. Our spiritual heart helps us measure our words and choose our actions. So how do we guard it?

Read Ephesians 6:10-18

I am participating in a Silence and Solitude retreat this weekend. This morning, the event coordinator sent me a text reminding me to be vigilant in God's Word, pray, and even incorporate healthy habits. She knows the enemy doesn't want us to have this time with Jesus.

She is telling us the way to guard our hearts is to be on the offense, expect Satan's shenanigans, and to be so close to God before we even get there that Satan can't get near our hearts.

She is telling us to armor up. Paul teaches us in Ephesians how to armor up for battle against the enemy and the powers of darkness. (Ephesians 6:12) These are the things we need to guard our spiritual hearts:

The belt of truth - Testing everything against the standard of God's Word.

The breastplate of righteousness - It's not our righteousness, (2 Corinthians 5:21) God credited Christ's perfect righteousness to us to stand in.

Feet with sandals fitted with readiness for the Gospel of peace - This comes from living in obedience to God.

Shield of faith - The enemy is firing flaming arrows at you daily; acting in faith activates the extinguisher needed.

Helmet of Salvation - Seeing through the lens of God's Word.

Sword of the Spirit - Knowing the Bible so well that it cuts right through the enemy's deceit.

Pray - We need prayer to access these resources, and it must be woven into every part of our lives for us to see the fruit.

When my boys were little, I watched the CBS soaps. At least a couple days a week, I would sit and watch three hours of The Young and the Restless, As the World Turns, and Guiding Light. When I was pregnant with Kirstin, I stopped turning the TV on. I didn't decide because I was smart enough to see how much time I wasted. I decided to quit watching because I had a car accident, and was on bed rest and all three of those soaps had storylines about miscarriage. I just didn't want to watch that.

While my reasoning was suspect, it was an excellent decision for me. My time was so much better spent, including more time with Jesus. Maybe if I'd assessed my time through the standard of God then, I would be closer to some of my spiritual goals now.

Friends, the enemy loves to use our weaknesses to find the cracks in our armor. Our biggest enemy is unseen, devious, and looking for ways to break our relationship with God. We are best prepared to win when we practice these seven truths and put on our battle armor.

This week, we will break down the armor of God. Each day on social media (and the web page), we will look at each piece of the armor and how it will ensure we guard our hearts against the world's lies and the enemy.

Our challenge for the week is choosing one piece of armor that is not routinely part of our daily routine and intentionally working it into our daily lives. What will you choose and why?

What steps do you take to make your physical heart healthy?

What steps do you naturally take to keep your spiritual heart healthy? What steps can you add to consider yourself ready to battle those powers of darkness?

Reread Proverbs 4:23; what is it saying to you personally, at this moment?

Read Ephesians 6:13-18 again. Circle the words that will prepare you for battle. Highlight those circled words you need to work on and lay out strategy to grow in those areas.

Abba, Father, you set the standard we need to fulfill the purpose you gave us to be battle ready every day. Open our hearts and minds to see where we can be better prepared to armor up and glorify you! You have given us exactly what we need to show you as the light of this world. Thank you! Amen.

Thoughts to journal this week.

Read the following statements. How do they affect how you interpret Proverbs 4:23? Spend some time each day contemplating them and how they affected your day.

Keep your heart under lock and key.

Protect it always.

What we store in our hearts dictates our speech, our actions, and our very life.