

Guarding Your Heart

Written and inspired by the book 'Waking the Dead' by John Eldridge. The chapter reference is 'Like the Treasures of the Kingdom' being chapter 12, pages 204-221.

Proverbs 4:23 "Above **everything else** guard your heart (make it a priority to look over it with all vigilance and diligence) for it is **the wellspring of life** and out of it flow the very waters of life (for it determines the direction and course of your life.)" The heart is a mysterious spiritual reality that allows us to experience the fullness of life (if we carefully direct it.) The heart is defined as '*the very core of life*'. Our heart is the truest expression of who we really are...at any time.

"Guarding your heart" does not imply watching over some dangerous wicked thing that needs to be kept under control at all times in case it leads us astray. No. It implies nurturing and caring for your heart because that is where all true life and goodness originate. John says "guarding my heart means I must practice the spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude. I must heed the voice of my True love who beckons me to come away with him." "that I need to lighten up on myself and live more intentionally in the expansive grace of God's mercy and joy." "it means drinking it in, enjoying it, tasting it, having fun in it." How kind of God to give us this warning of "guarding our hearts", like someone's entrusting to a friend something precious to him, with the words: "Be careful with this—it is precious to me."

Jesus on the last day of the feast, stood and called out in a loud voice "If anyone of you is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. whoever believes in me, as the scriptures has said, streams of living water will flow from within him (from your innermost being)." John 7:37-38. Jesus is telling us here how to remedy our lack of life so that we can love and live it to the fullest. He is telling us to fill our hearts first with his living water. We do this by walking with him and letting his reservoir spill over into our hearts so they are always being topped up.

What about the subject of "*giving your heart?*" This seems to be an obvious other side of the coin to explore a little. For those who guard their hearts like a dangerous animal, it would be very difficult for them to give anything good out of their heart. For those who wish to follow what God says we should take note of the first and great commandment (Matt.22:38-39) which says: "*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...and others as yourselves.*" If we get this right it will put us on the right path. Our first love must be for God, and love for him must be above any love for anyone else. Do not forget 'love is an action, an act of your will'. Emotion does not necessarily qualify as love. When we give our hearts to others we are in dangerous territory. This does not mean you are not to love your spouse or children and friends, you just need to be careful in how you handle your heart in all relationships. You may say "This is just too hard". Go and talk to God about it and he will tell you something like "if you guard your heart correctly, you will be able to love correctly." Jesus is the master lover and we can all learn about this from him.

Clairvaux described Christian maturity as the stage where "*we love ourselves for God's sake,*" meaning that because God considers our hearts to be the treasures of the kingdom, we should also.

So, let us ask ourselves this question: How would you live differently from now if you believed your heart was the *treasure of the kingdom*? In order to answer this question we need more information because it has to do with how we handle our heart. You see, caring for our hearts isn't selfishness: it's how we begin to love. You cannot love others until you love yourself. How can you bring something to others if your heart is empty, dried up or pinned down. For how you handle your own heart will determine how you handle theirs. This is the wisdom behind Jesus urging us '*to love others as ourselves.*'

How are we to love ourselves correctly, and if we do, how are we to treat our hearts for the treasures they truly are? If we are to love ourselves correctly, we need to see ourselves as God sees us, otherwise we will have a false image. Many have a poor self image and as such cannot love themselves. Correction of this is necessary and can be done by an encounter with Jesus. We all should have good self esteem, without it being too over the top. Self love is about respecting our whole person, our physical being, our emotions and our spirit man. We will learn how to nurture our hearts a little later on. Firstly, let us have a look at what Dallas Willard said about God. "*He is full of joy. Undoubtedly he is the most joyous being in the universe. The abundance of his love and generosity is inseparable from his infinite joy. All of the good and beautiful things from which we occasionally drink, God continuously experiences in all their breadth, depth and richness.*" Has it occurred to you that God is a loving and generous person because his heart is filled, like a reservoir, with joy? Because of this God is able to love, forgive and suffer without depleting his reservoir of joy. We should aim to be more like this.

Caring for your own heart is also how you protect your relationship with God. Now there's a new thought for us to think about. Our heart is the dwelling place where God communicates with us. It is where we hear his voice. Believers who never hear from God are the same ones who live far away from their hearts; they practice the Christianity of principles, and then wonder why God seems distant.

So, back to the question: How would you live differently from now if you believed your heart was the *treasure of the kingdom*? What does your heart need? In some sense this is a personal question, unique to our makeup and what brings us life. Your heart needs regular refreshing. This is a practice you need to develop. You need to schedule time for your heart 2-3 times a week, maybe even daily at first, otherwise you will begin to experience deficit and not be able to give out of your abundance to others. This is exactly why people burn out! They have not understood the principle: you need input to have output. Set aside some time to discover what your heart needs. Remember, it is not selfish to give your heart what it needs. It is essential! Some may like to find a cosy corner to read, others time in the garden, a bush walk with your dog or friends, a movie, listening to some favourite music, woodworking, painting, sailing...the list is endless. Just identify what makes you come alive and go and do that 2-3 times a week. Some of the things you enjoy may be seasonal, like catching a wave at the beach, or seeing the snow fall, but if you don't like it then don't do it. Lastly, if you have trouble with doing this ask God: *What do you have for my heart?* You'll be stunned at what he guides you into.

And, be aware that the enemy will tell you all of this is foolish, that there are so many other urgent and important things to be done. Do not fall for his rhetoric. He fears your heart coming alive, full and free. Caring for your heart is an act of obedience. It is an act of love, an act of faith, an act of war.

Caring for your heart is the first blow against the enemy's schemes. A weak heart is vulnerable and also open to temptation. His first wave of attack is to rob us of the heart to fight back. Heads up-it always starts this way, with the sense of being too tired or overwhelmed, and take note...it's going to get worse. So, if you don't want to be taken out, you must be kind to yourself and care for your heart. This is your first line of defence. After all, Jesus did warn us. John Eldridge says "Let me say one more time '*we are at war*'. the worst scenes in the movies 'Lord of the Rings, The Matrix, Gladiator' are merely trying to awake you to the reality in which we now live." Jesus knows what is coming. If you are in doubt, read C.S. Lewis's last instalment in 'The Chronicles of Narnia' titled '*The Last Battle*' There are images here that God is giving to his people for this last hour. They are gifts to us from his hand in order to strengthen us. The hour is late and so much time has been wasted. Aslan is on the move and we must rally to him at the stone table. Grab everything God sends to you and ride, ride hard. You'll need everything that helps you to see with the eyes of your heart, including the myths, for they will illuminate the way for us to arise and shine and walk in victory over the darkness that is coming.

Wake up sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.
-the Apostle Paul.
(Eph.5:14)

Peter Dunnet
www.issacharportal.com.au