

Guard!
Proverbs 4:20-27

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Text Introduction: You have heard it said many times that the book of Proverbs is the most practical book in the Bible. Every line is flowing with God's wisdom. Indeed the book of Proverbs is categorized as a book of wisdom. In this book, you will discover wisdom for so many areas of life—money, marriage, and work. Most anything you are concerned about, you will find God's wisdom here in the book of Proverbs. You will notice that often times in this book, it is packaged as the wisdom of a father being passed along to a son.

Text: My son, pay attention to my words;
listen closely to my sayings.

²¹ Don't lose sight of them;

keep them within your heart.

²² For they are life to those who find them,
and health to one's whole body.

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

²⁴ Don't let your mouth speak dishonestly,
and don't let your lips talk deviously.

²⁵ Let your eyes look forward;
fix your gaze straight ahead.

²⁶ Carefully consider the path for your feet,
and all your ways will be established.

²⁷ Don't turn to the right or to the left;
keep your feet away from evil.

Introduction: So, I'm coaching a 7-8 year old basketball team. We had our first game of the season yesterday. While we are not ready yet for the NBA, it is fun watching these boys learn the basics of the game. One of the basics that we are trying to teach is to defend or as we say in basketball, "Guard." I find myself saying things like, "Don't ever take your eyes off your man." "Stay between your man and the goal." Guarding is hard.

In our text today, we have one obvious reference to "guard" but four other references that are just as important. I want to show you these five places to guard. Our ability to guard these five areas may well determine the way 2018 goes for us.

Guard Your Mind! (20-22)

This refers to your beliefs.

3 Keys:

(1) Give attention to spiritually mature people. (20)

(2) Don't abandon what you have learned. (21)

(3) Acknowledge the benefits of your instruction. (22)

As a preacher named Donald Grey Barnhouse summarized over 50 years ago, by way of a title of a book, the battle for the mind is an invisible war.

Guard Your Heart! (23)

This refers to your passions.

The Biblical usage does not refer to our physical organ, but instead the “whole personality of the individual.” We might say that the heart refers to what makes us really “tick.” What is it that really gets you excited? What do you live for?

In that we are told to “guard our hearts” we probably ought to realize that we often let our hearts be unguarded. We leave our hearts unguarded by not paying attention to the instruction of God’s Word.

—However strong a castle may be, if a treacherous party resides inside (ready to betray at the first opportunity possible), the castle cannot be kept safe from the enemy. Traitors occupy our own hearts, ready to side with every temptation and to surrender to them all. // —Theologian John Owen (1616–1683)

One phrase really stand out here—“above all else.” The other items that we talk about here determine the guarding of our hearts ultimately.

Guard your mouth! (24)

We spent some time last summer dealing with this subject of our words. Some might need to go online and revisit this series. We said, among other things, that there is a power in our words. We also said that the problem with our tongue is not our tongues, but shows a deeper problem—a problem with our hearts.

And then we focused on this prayer—Psalm 141:3

Lord, set up a guard for my mouth; keep watch at the door of my lips.

Guard your Eyes! (25)

This refers to your temptations

Four Great Temptations:

- (1) money (23:4-5)
- (2) envy of sinners (23:17-18)
- (3) sexual immorality (23:27-28)
- (4) alcohol (23:29-35)

Guard your Decisions (26-27)

Every decision has consequences. Why not decide to trust Christ and follow Him?

There was once a man who did exactly these five things. Many would call him the wisest man that ever lived. As a result, this man basked in the blessings of God. But, listen to how his biographer summarized the end of his life.

“His heart was not completely with the LORD his God as his father’s heart had been. He did what was evil in the LORD’s sight and did not completely follow the LORD. The LORD appeared to him twice to warn him about this, but he did not do what the LORD had commanded.” (My wording based on 1 Kings 11:1-13)

Who was that? Solomon! You see, you can give right advice, but not follow that advice. There might be a dad here today who has not followed his own advice. There might be many here today who once guarded the heart like a fortress, but today, you acknowledge that you have let much slip through the walls.

So What?

The words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6 is a good reminder of how we are to guard. This is how we stand.

1. We are to be strengthened by the Lord and His vast strength.
2. Put on the full armor of God—truth, righteousness, the Gospel of peace, faith, and salvation.
3. Take up the Sword of the Spirit—the Word of God.
4. Pray at all times in the Spirit.

One hundred sixty years ago, Spurgeon preached a sermon on Proverbs 4. He gave this wonderful example that is just as true today as it was 160 years ago. He said, that to guard our hearts is like a city required to guard its water source for its citizens. They must (1) tap into a pure source, (2) they must take care of what flows in, and (3) they must continue to test what flows out.

I love this picture.

What about you? Have you, first of all, tapped into the right source—Jesus? Are you taking care of what flows in? Eliminating the rotten stuff and allowing God’s Holy Word to pour in? What is flowing out?

Above all else in 2018—guard your mind, your heart, your mouth, your eyes, and your decisions.

Listen, the devil Himself roams around like a roaring lion looking for anyone he can devour. (So says 1 Peter 5:8)

But, listen there is better news: (2 Chronicles 16:9) “For the eyes of the Lord roam throughout the earth to show Himself strong for those who are wholeheartedly devoted to Him.”