

Keep Your Heart

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Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23).

The heart is referenced over 750 times in the Bible. In most instances, it is not referring to the organ that pumps blood throughout our body. More often, the Bible uses the heart as a metaphor for something different inside of us. Not something physical but what you might call the essence of a person. The very core of a person's character or their nature.

When God looks at a person, when He takes a measure of who they are, it is at the heart that He looks. God says as much when He sent Samuel to anoint David king in **1 Samuel 16:7**. As Samuel examines the sons of Jesse, he first looks to their physical appearance, but God corrects him,

Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

In examining the heart, God is not measuring beats per minute or looking for irregular rhythms. He's looking into the person to see who they really are, their character, what will define their actions, choices, and priorities. The heart bears the truth of who we are to God.

This is likely the reason for the instruction in **Proverbs 4:23**, quoted above, and other passages to keep our heart. To keep means to tend to. In other places in the Bible, this word is used to describe a watchman whose job is to look outside the walls for threats. To keep is also used to describe the management of crops. In one instance, in **Isaiah 27**, God is metaphorically speaking of the children of Israel as a vineyard. He talks of keeping His vineyard: watering and caring for it, removing briars and thorns so that the good vines may grow.

Painting these pictures puts together what it means to keep the heart. As a watchman, we are looking into the world for danger. What things out there threaten what is inside? What could damage my character, dull my conscience, and pull me in such a way that I make poor decisions? Just as we are looking outside, we are also looking inside, as we would tend a vineyard. What is in my heart that needs to be removed? What needs to be cultivated to allow for growth?

The heart, as the Bible uses the term, is highly impressionable. The Bible describes this metaphorical heart as something that can be written upon. It can keep and retain things. It can bind things to itself. It can lust, deceive, and motivate. It can be applied to a task or set upon a path. That has happened to each of our hearts. Each of our hearts is inscribed upon, it is retaining, it has bound itself to something, it is motivating us to action and setting us upon a path. That has been done by what we have let into our hearts and what we have allowed to cultivate there.

If we want to follow the Lord, make the right decisions, and be on the right path, then we need to write His words on our hearts. In doing that, the dangers become more apparent and what needs to be rooted out becomes clearer. The path we should take is revealed. These things will also have a compounding effect. When we act upon something in our hearts, it's like we are engraving that thing a little deeper. This can happen with righteousness as it can with sin.

- **Proverbs 15:14**, *“The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouths of fools feeds on foolishness.”*
- **Proverbs 15:28**, *“The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.”*
- **Proverbs 18:15**, *“The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.”*

These passages show that knowledge, righteousness and understanding have a way compounding. He who has understanding seeks knowledge. He who has a righteous heart studies. A prudent heart acquires knowledge. When we get our heart to the right place, it wants to lead us further on the right path.

This will only happen with effort and honest introspection. It is tempting to be more concerned about looking good than being good. It's the earthenware covered with silver dross that **Proverbs 26:23** speaks of or the whitewashed tombs Christ used to describe the Pharisees in **Matthew 23**. They look good on the outside, but the content – the heart – is cheap, ugly, and rotting. Even with the shiny veneer, the sometimes subtle effects of the sin in our hearts will come to bear. The good deed left undone or the indifference that results in inaction. The pride that causes strife. The selfishness that causes us to put ourselves first. The disinterest that leads us to not being involved or to not give the Lord's work the time, energy or effort we should.

Keep your heart. Watch for dangers and do not let them in. Tend to your heart like you would a vineyard. Find the sin, however subtle, and root it out. And work to write the Lord's word upon it.