

# Spiritual Health Check-Up: How's Your Heart

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[ 0 : 00 ] Here we are at the beginning of a new year, first Sunday of a new year. A lot of people have resolved to get in better physical condition.

And that's good. Now, I don't want to point any fingers or anything like that. But a lot of us, and I'm one, we do need to get in better physical condition.

And it's not just someone who's overweight. You can be, you know, appear to be in good shape and still not really be all that healthy. We need to be more health conscious.

And at the top of our list, we need to take better care of our heart. You know this. It's no secret. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in both men and women in this country and really in the world.

It is wise for us to pay close attention to the condition of our heart. That organ, this beating inside of our chest right now.

[ 1 : 08 ] But that's not the only heart we need to be concerned about. I want you to look with me. It's going to be on the screen. I want you to look at a passage, Proverbs chapter 4.

And it is a great example of how the Bible talks about the kind of heart that every Christian needs to be concerned about.

Look at it. Proverbs chapter 4, verse 23. He tells us, Keep your heart with all vigilance.

For from it flow the springs of life. The ESV, English Standard Version, New American Standard, they're being more literal in trying to convey exactly how the Hebrew states it.

The NIV is concerned about being accurate for sure. But the NIV puts it a little bit freer like this.

[ 2 : 12 ] Above all else, guard your heart for everything you do flows from it. On this first Sunday of the New Year, we need to understand that God considers guarding our hearts to be one of the top priorities, or should be one of the top priorities of our lives.

Think with me. Look at the passage. One of life's top priorities for us should be guarding, protecting who we are on the inside.

What the Bible calls our heart. You see, the condition of our heart affects everything about us. If we took the time to really just interact with one another this morning, sit down face to face, have a conversation with one another in depth about some substantive things, we could figure out the condition to a certain extent of each other's heart.

You see, the condition of our heart affects our attitude. It affects our words. It affects our actions. The attitude of our heart affects the kind of relationship that we have with God. It reflects the kind of relationship that we have with other people.

[ 3 : 44 ] what's going on inside us, the condition of our heart. It affects our own well-being. Psychologically, emotionally, and to a certain extent, physically.

The importance of this kind of heart health that I'm talking about will become more clear as we look at what Solomon and other biblical writers have to say about it.

So I want you to pay close attention this morning. First Sunday of the new year, we're focusing on something that God makes clear, and it'll be even clearer to you as we go through this.

God wants you and me to make protecting, guarding our hearts one of the top priorities of our lives every day.

I want us to pray together and ask God to help us to really focus, take this seriously, and listen and learn how we can do this. Okay? Let's pray. Dear God, help each one of us in this room right now to see that through this book of wisdom, through this wise man, Solomon, you are giving us some of the most important and helpful counsel we could ever receive.

[ 5 : 05 ] Help us to understand that, to take it seriously, and to put forth the effort every day to guard our heart.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Let's think. What does it mean to guard our heart above all else? The first thing we need to be clear about is what this word heart is referring to in this passage, and in a lot of places when it's used like this, hundreds of places actually in the Bible.

A lot of people think that when you talk about guarding your heart, doing something with your heart, you're just talking about your emotions and your feelings. Well, that's not true. It's more than that. When Solomon and the other biblical writers use the word heart, like we see here, he's talking about the depth of our being.

He's talking about who we really are on the inside. Look at how Chuck Swindoll describes it. He says it refers to our inner being, our seat of consciousness, our core of decision making, the center of our mind, our emotions, and our will.

When the Bible uses the word heart like this, when Solomon says guard your heart, he's talking about who you are deep down. He's talking about guard your thoughts and your attitudes.

[ 6 : 30 ] Guard your desires and your feelings. All of this. It's comprehensive. Now, I want you to note this is not just something that we can take casually because the Bible doesn't take it casually.

Note what we're told to do. We're going to look at several things here in this one first half of the verse. The ESV, what I'm reading and what's on the screen, says keep your heart. The New American Standard says watch over your heart.

And several translations like the New International Version say guard your heart. Solomon is saying to us this morning, keep a close eye on your heart.

Watch it like a hawk. Guard it. Protect it. That's not all he says. Look at how we are instructed to guard our heart. It says with all vigilance.

New American Standard says with all diligence. NIV above all else. God considers our heart to be crucial to our well-being in so many dimensions.

[ 7 : 42 ] listen. Guarding our hearts, our thoughts, our desires, it is vitally important if we really want to please God and live in close fellowship with Him and enjoy healthy relationships with other people.

Let's think about this idea of guarding. What are you guarding right now? I would say that most everyone in here, when you left home this morning, you made sure you locked your house up. I know one man, not in this church, he is so consumed, obsessed with guarding his house. He's got all kinds of security cameras and everywhere he goes, including church every Sunday morning, he's sitting there.

People think he's reading the Bible with his smartphone. He's watching his house. He's guarding his stuff and I'm not making that up.

That's a fact. You probably locked your car. That's good. Wise. If you've got money in some kind of financial institution and you do anything with it, you take care of it, manage it mainly online, that, your money's password protected at least in two different ways.

[ 9 : 06 ] Even if you don't bank or do things online, you don't leave your bank passwords just lying around where anybody and everyone can come in and see it, do you? We protect our money.

Let's think about something even more important. If you have children at home or if you have children like grandchildren, nieces and nephews that come into your home, don't you try to protect them?

You don't let your little children just turn on the TV and watch whatever they want to watch, whatever's there, do you? Surely not. You don't let your children just have absolute free access to anything under the sun they want to look at online.

You don't leave guns just out in the open, a loaded gun just where they can walk by and look at it, play with it, or anything like that.

Things that we value, we guard, we protect. All of us do it. We are right now in some way familiar with what Solomon is saying here about we're guarding children.

[ 10 : 19 ] another person, money, house, something. What Solomon is telling us here now, in no way is the Bible or would God minimize the importance of guarding your stuff, protecting the people that you're responsible for.

That's important. But on top of that, above all else, guard your heart. Now let's think about that.

Do you guard what comes into your mind, what comes into your heart, what comes into your life, what you think about, what you dwell on, what you desire?

Do you guard it as carefully, as faithfully, as diligently as you do this other stuff?

or these important people in your life? That's where we need to start at this point. That's how serious God is in telling us to guard our hearts above all else, with all diligence, with all vigilance. [11:26] We cannot guard our hearts enough. Now, it may be that we don't guard our hearts like we should because we don't understand why it's so important.

So let's answer another question. Why should I guard my heart? Why should I do it? Well, Solomon answers that question with the next phrase. Look at it. For from it flow the springs of life.

That's how the English Standard Version and the New American Standard translate that. The idea is like this. Our heart produces a stream of water.

To use that illustration. It's like our heart produces a stream of water that continuously flows out from us and into the lives of other people. The NIV says it this way.

For everything you do flows from it. Here's the idea. Whatever is in our hearts, whatever we're dwelling on, whatever is concerning us, whatever it is we're focused on, that is having an effect on people around us.

[12:40] What's in our heart is flowing out from us and it's touching the lives of your family members, your friends, people you work with, people you go to school with, whether you're conscious of it or not.

I want you to look at something Jesus said about how that which is within us flows out. He explained it in Luke chapter 6 verse 45 very clearly. Look at it.

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

I want you to think about some of the conversations you've had this past week. Think about some of the conversations you've had with your family members there in your home. Both good and not so good.

Think about some of the things you and your buddies have talked about, some of your friends have talked about. Think about some of the things, topics, attitudes that have come forth as you've talked with your co-workers.

[13:50] That which we have spoken of, been excited about, been angry about, that which we have emphasized this past week.

It has revealed the condition of our heart. The attitudes we display, the words that we speak, are a good indication of how seriously we have taken this command to guard our hearts above all else.

Now, I want to pause here for a moment. Think about what Jesus is saying in this verse, the first part of it. The good person, out of the good treasure of his heart, produces good.

Now, I'm sure there's people in this room, you're thinking, well, I thought the Bible only talked about our hearts being evil. And may have come to your mind a verse like Jeremiah 17, 9.

Look at it. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it? Jeremiah is pointing out how we are all born with a sinful nature.

[15:04] How sin has corrupted everything about us, the way that we think. Sin causes us to be selfish and self-centered. Think more in terms of how I can live life.

my way to please me instead of God's way to please him or even to please other people. There is much evil about us and our hearts in no way are pure because we're born with a sinful nature that taints, that corrupts, that poisons every aspect of our lives to some degree, not totally, obviously.

But what I want us to understand is what Jeremiah says in 17.9 about the heart being deceitful above all things, that's not all he says. I want you to look with me at Jeremiah 31 verse 33.

He describes how one day God's going to do a new work in people. He's talking about the new covenant, the New Testament times. Jeremiah is looking forward to the day when Jesus would come, the Messiah would come, he would come and save people through his death and resurrection.

He would send back into heaven, he would send his Holy Spirit and this is something that was going to be in the future, Jeremiah prophesied about. Look at it. I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people.

[16:33] The heart, just like Jesus says, there's good in it and there's evil in it. Wayne Grudem, great Baptist theologian, he does a good job of explaining how a Christian's heart can produce good things as well as the evil.

Look at some of the things he says. He says several verses in the New Testament speak in a quite positive way about the condition of our hearts. If we've been born again, there is a goodness to

them that has to be protected.

That's why Solomon says, guard your heart. Look at what Grudem, he cites some New Testament passages. Look at Romans 5, 5. God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

When God saves us, when God does this work of regeneration, he puts his spirit in us and you can even think, he puts his spirit in our heart, in our inmost being. And then the verse says God's love has been poured into our hearts.

So if God's love has been poured into our hearts and the spirit indwells us, there is good within every Christian. Look what else he says in Romans 6, 17. You have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you are committed.

[17:46] Grudem is pointing out here in this passage that Paul thinks some of these Christians, they're truly loving God and obeying God from their heart.

They're genuine. Some Christians have this idea, God's never satisfied with me. God can never be pleased with me. Well, that's wrong. We can know God and love him, have a close relationship with him where he accepts us because of our being united to Jesus.

And he is pleased with us when we obey him. Look at one more. 1 John 3, 21. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God.

Now, Grudem goes on to say, however, that's not the whole New Testament story. James warns Christians about some things that can go wrong in their hearts. Now, look at this. Look at both sides of the story.

If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. James is just pointing out the reality.

[18:54] As a Christian, we can still have bad attitudes. We can be bitter. We can be jealous. We can have nothing but selfish ambition. We want to run over everybody.

We want to be better than everybody. We want to put people down. We want to walk on them if necessary. We can do that. We do that sometimes. When our heart is filled with sin and selfishness.

James is saying it. Look out. Verse 4, chapter 4, verse says, purify your hearts. He says, you double-minded. Sometimes our hearts are not pure.

A lot of times they're not. Isn't that right? Grudem continues. So, even though the New Testament talks about our hearts as having been cleansed when we're born again, James says you can have bitter jealousy in your heart as a Christian.

You can have selfish ambition. And you can be double-minded. And so, while our hearts aren't perfect, there is a goodness in them by Jesus' work within us that needs to be protected and guarded.

[20:00] Keep your heart with all vigilance because it can go astray. Let's come back to what we looked at a moment ago.

We need to make, every one of us need to make guarding our heart our highest priority, one of the highest priorities in our lives. Because the condition of our heart determines how we think, how we speak, how we act.

And Jesus makes that painfully clear in His explanation of the source of some of our sinful attitudes and words and actions.

I want you to look at what Jesus said in Mark 7. 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. We don't like to think about this, but we need to.

[21:17] The truth is, if we have problems with selfishness, with lust, with greed, with gossip, and all these kinds of things, it's because those are the attitudes and the feelings that's within us.

That's where it comes from. That's not all that's in us, within us we're Christians. We've seen there's some good things that God has done in us.

But we cannot deny the truth about sin in our heart when it comes out so clearly, so loudly in our words, in our actions, and in our attitudes.

Now, we don't always mean all the things that we say. Sometimes we say hurtful things, painful things.

Sometimes we mistreat another person, not because we really have a problem with them, but because of the problem that's going on inside of us.

[ 22 : 41 ] Sometimes our anger toward another person, it's not really about them, or what they have done or said. What happens, what they did or said triggered something within our hearts that caused us to erupt like a volcano all over them.

You know, we're all good at playing the blame game, aren't we? I'm sure some of you in this room, I've thought it, said it. My parents caused me a, it's my parents' fault that I have the attitude I have sometimes to say some of the things that I say.

Or it's that certain person. They just bring out the worst in me. They provoke me. They make me mad. No. No. Your spouse is not your problem.

Your child is not your problem. Your parent is not your problem. Your friend is not your problem. They may trigger some emotions. They may trigger some desires, some feelings, some attitudes. But what's coming out of your mouth, what you are demonstrating with your life, it comes from within. It's a heart problem.

[ 24 : 03 ] It's your inner heart problem that is the source of all this Jesus says. Sometimes an explosion of anger, of profanity, of hatefulness.

Sometimes it comes out because of the spiritual battles that are raging within us. The first thing that probably comes to your mind, mine too, is sometimes God's working in us, convicting us of a certain sin that we need to confess, we need to repent of, some things in our life that needs to change, and we just won't do it.

But if we're really Christians and the Spirit of God lives within us, He's not leaving us alone. He's making our life miserable. He's putting the pressure on us to cause us to be so miserable, so uncomfortable that we will forsake it.

We will seek God's forgiveness. We will repent. We will seek God's help to overcome it. And that may be what your problem is. It's not a problem with anybody in your life.

It's you and your unwillingness to humble yourself before God, to admit the problem, admit the sin, and respond the way you know He wants you to.

[ 25 : 20 ] But on the other hand, it could be, it's not a bad thing, it could be that God's dealing with you about something that He wants you to do. And you know you need to do it.

But you just won't. The best example I've known of this, I have a friend, many years ago, when he was an older teenager, his mother told this story.

His dad was winding up a 20-year military career. This was a committed Christian family. The father, winding up his 20 years, going to retire from military service, and he was, God was dealing with him about him going into the preaching ministry.

He was struggling over whether or not God was calling him to preach, and he really believed that he was deep down, but I don't know if he was really wanting to do it at the time, or make the commitment at the time, and there was a lot of frustration in his life.

One day, this man, this faithful Christian man, in whom God's working, calling him to preach, 40-something years old, one day, he just erupts in anger and just explodes all over that older teenage boy.

[ 26 : 42 ] It's happened so much, and they know what's going on, and that boy looks at his dad and says, Dad, when are you going to surrender to God's call to preach so we can have peace in this family?

And that was really one of the turning points. But what I'm saying is, it could be that God's working in your life wanting you to do something, to teach, to go on a mission trip, to do something that's very positive and good.

It's not a sin issue. It's a sin because you're not obeying him, but it's a good thing. And you're frustrated because you just won't trust God. You won't get out of your comfort zone.

You won't step out in faith. And so it could be that your whole problem with your heart is you just need to say yes and cooperate with God and move on and do what it is He's wanting you to do.

We need to listen to Solomon's wise counsel above all else. Guard your heart. Guard your heart because what's going on inside you will flow like a river from your heart into the lives of everybody around you.

[ 28 : 00 ] You know, this may be, this may help explain why sometimes we mistreat those we are closest to more than anyone else in our lives.

It may be that we mistreat people closest to us because they can't get out of the way of what's flowing out of our hearts when other people can.

And that doesn't excuse our behavior but it may help us understand it a little bit better. Let's answer one more question very quickly. How can I guard my heart? Since Solomon tells us to guard our heart, we know we can.

God doesn't call us, doesn't tell us to do anything that he won't give us the ability to do. Well, Solomon describes some of the ways that we need to guard our heart, how we can, in the remainder of this chapter, verses 24 through 27.

But right now, I want to just look at two as we wind this message up. One way to guard our heart is to keep it pure. Don't pollute your heart.

[ 29 : 06 ] It could be that there's people or a person in your life whose presence, whose influence, it really pollutes your heart.

And what you need to do is you need to recognize that and move away from them. Don't let them be a part of your life.

Or if you can't help it, they may live close to you. You may have to work with them. If that's the case, what you need to do is to consciously recognize that person is a bad influence on me.

And so I'm going to be on guard constantly and not let them corrupt my heart. Don't admire them. Everybody else may. Don't admire them.

Don't follow their example. Let their attitudes and let their words become offensive to you.

[ 30 : 16 ] Don't let them have the wrong kind of influence on you. And maybe you know that there are other factors that pollute your heart.

Certain types of movies or TV shows or internet websites or books or music. You know, you know what helps you to be a better Christian, helps you to love God more, to think of Him more, to want to do His will more.

You know what helps you to want to love people and be patient with people and serve people more. And you know what causes you to not even think about God. You know what causes you to be rebellious, to have an attitude, to separate yourself from God's people, to separate yourself from godly people.

I don't know what it might be for you, but you know what it is for you. God, guard your heart from anything that hinders you from having a close and growing relationship with the Lord and having healthy relationships with the people in your life that you should have healthy relationships with.

You know, anyone who writes on this subject of guarding our heart or growing as a Christian, they're going to stress the importance of personal Bible study and prayer. And that's sort of a given. There's absolutely no substitute if we're going to guard our hearts from spending time with our Lord, developing a growing close relationship with God by talking to Him on a regular basis in prayer, by listening to Him as we read His Word and He's talking to us, and then putting it into practice.

[ 32 : 01 ] Not just getting up in the morning and having devotion, but learning to live in a conscious awareness of God's presence, learning just to talk to Him as we just go down the road, as we live life, learning to think about the truth of His Word like what we're looking at this morning.

Guard your heart. Guard your heart. I want to encourage you right now to examine your heart and determine what condition it's in.

To do that, I want you to think about your overall attitude toward God. What do you really think about Him? How do you think about Him? What's your overall attitude just toward life?

Toward the people around you? Toward your spouse? Toward your children? Toward your parents? What's your overall attitude toward the people you work with? Toward your job? Toward school? Toward school? Think about the conversations you've had this past week.

Think about the way you have spoken to people in your home and at work. Think about the kinds of things you have talked about, laughed about, cried about, been serious about, been flippant and casual about.

[ 33 : 20 ] Now, what do those attitudes and those words reveal about the condition of your heart? Does it reveal that your heart's healthy?

It very well could. Does it reveal that it is somewhat healthy? Or as you just think back about just this past week, do your attitudes, do your words reveal that your heart is very unhealthy?

What what do you need to do to start guarding your heart above everything else? What do you need to start or stop in order to protect your heart or make protecting your heart number one

priority?

If you know, then ask God to help you start doing those things right now. Ask God to help you to just stay focused on Him every day, to guard your heart every day, especially in those situations where you know it's going to be difficult.

Make it not just a commitment this morning, make it a daily commitment. Make it a make it a part of your relationship with God to seek His help and to seek to be obedient to Him in such matters.

[ 34 : 43 ] If you don't know what you need to do, ask God to show you. Ask God to make it clear through His Word.

Here's something risky. Ask people that you know who are faithful Christians, who love you and who will tell you the truth, ask them what they see in your heart by living with you, by being around you, by working with you, going to school with you, playing, doing all, doing whatever.

Ask some people that you trust. If you don't know, you wonder, ask some people. Based on what we're looking at, what do you think the condition of my heart is right now based on what you see in me, based on what you hear from me?

You know, if you're not a Christian more than anything else this morning, you need to understand that your heart is not right with God. It's like what Jeremiah talks about, being evil, maybe not the worst you could be, but it's selfish.

It's not godly. And I want to encourage you, if that's the case and you want God to change your heart, admit to Him this need, truly repent of your sin, change your mind about it, put your trust in Jesus that He paid the penalty for your sins when He died on the cross, call upon Him to save you, to change you, to purify you, to give you a new heart.

[ 36 : 28 ] Listen to the Lord right now. Ask Him how you need to respond so that you can have a more healthy, spiritual, inner heart in 2018.

Let's pray together. Dear God, show us right now what we need to do to please you in our response and help us to do that.

In an attitude of prayer, you listen to the Lord and you obey Him. Do what He's telling you to do. If you would like me to pray with you during this time, I'll be here at the front and I would love to do that.

But listen and obey Him resolved by His grace. You're going to guard your heart in 2018.

Above all things, you respond with it. His bowed, eyes closed, attitude of prayer, you respond as God speaks. When you arrive to verdade, how cute old man since they End Was with prayer, what she should live with you and then reorganize again.

[ 37 : 41 ] In■ todasIE' with skills, and women may have created, like anyone who can find so crying today.■■■■ ■■ will call us in 2019. Right, word of prayer, and we will show you how zoe an example.