

MATTERS OF THE HEART

A LESSON SERIES ON GUARDING THE HEART

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Lesson 1

How To Guard Your Heart 1

*“Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it” (Proverbs 4:23)*

WELCOME

Ask the group to share their best practices on how to secure against theft the following items: cellphone, money, savings, vehicle, stocked food, and collections (e.g. toys, shoes, etc.).

We all want to keep our personal belongings safe at all times and we have lots of ideas how to secure them. Sadly, we often fail to secure our most important belonging—our hearts. The good news is: we can give it to the Lord who knows exactly what to do.

WORSHIP

Lead the group into singing “My Heart is Yours” by Kristian Stanfill or listen to it together.

WORD

HOOK: In making decisions, do you often use your head or your heart?

BOOK: Read Proverbs 4:23

1. Make Him your priority

Our world has a lot to offer when it comes to fun and pleasure. It knows how to entice us because our desires have no end. The more we have, the more we want. And it'll be a tiring hunt for satisfaction unless we realize that only Jesus truly satisfies.

The sad reality is that even Christians who already accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior still fall victim to the enemy's traps. The blessings that God bestows upon us become the very thing that hinder us from Him. A student who gets so busy with school requirements trades his/her quiet time in order to finish some more projects. A young professional who gets overwhelmed by the tasks and responsibilities resolves to spend Sundays for recreation to get some rest instead of attending church.

We have acquired a mentality that if our excuse is related to our family, school or work, they are valid. And if my excuse is valid, it's okay not to do my devotion or it's okay to miss church. But the more we succumb to these excuses, the more we draw away from Him. Jesus should be our priority and when He is your priority, He gets the best of your time, not the rest of it.

Jesus said in Luke 14:26-27, *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”*

2. Do it proactively

The statement “guard your heart” is a call to action. It demands that we do something. Guarding our hearts is our business and not anybody else’s. Your small group leader cannot do it for you. Your pastor cannot do it for you. Only you have the capacity to control yourself with the enabling power of the Spirit. It is a decision you have to make for yourself.

The problem is that most of us like to play the role of a victim. We have accepted and settled in the fact that we are weak and can’t do anything about it. If you know it’s going to rain, you’ll bring an umbrella with you, right? If you know a certain road is dangerous, you’ll take the other road instead, won’t you? We can do something about it. Don’t seek help when it’s already too late. Set your own precautionary measures. Practice spiritual disciplines. Be consistent. As the saying goes, prevention is better than cure.

3. Surrender it to God

What consumes your heart consumes you. Jeremiah 17:9-10 says, *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I, the Lord search the heart and examine*

the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.”

The passage clearly tells us that we cannot trust our hearts. We should not be carried away by mere emotions and the best thing to do is to surrender everything to the Lord who knows us well. Surrendering means giving Him full control of all our decisions and consulting Him first in every step we take. It is a 100% commitment and not a spur of the moment thing. Only in God’s hands can we fully secure our hearts from the thieves of this world.

LOOK: Can you say that you have really surrendered your heart to Jesus? How?

What particular areas of your life are you finding hard to give the Lord full control?

TOOK: What specific actions will you do to proactively guard your heart from now on? Begin your statement with *I will* _____.

Take note of your members answers and make sure to follow them up throughout the week.

WORKS

Lead the group into prayer according to their response to the Word.

(This lesson is based on Pastor Jopel Bargan’s sermon at Generation Congregation service on 04 February 2017).

Lesson 2

HOW TO GUARD YOUR HEART 2

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

WELCOME

Ask your members how their week was. What personal goals have they achieved this week?

WORSHIP

Lead the group in prayer. The group may also sing “Yield my Heart” by Kim Walker.

WORD

HOOK: Have you experienced being robbed? Or been a victim of a snatcher? Share to the group your experience.

BOOK: Last week, we talked about 3 ways on how to guard our hearts and concluded that the best way is to

surrender it to the Lord. This time, we will discuss 5 more practical ways.

What are five ways to guard our hearts?

1. Stay awake!

Being asleep either connotes death or spiritual failure. When the time for Jesus to be crucified is almost at hand, He went to Gethsemane with some of his disciples to pray. He asked them to pray with him and warned them saying, *“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Matthew 26:41). But Jesus found the disciples sleeping not just once but thrice!

Jesus modeled a life of prayer. He made sure to talk to the Father before engaging people. He sets time for prayer and encouraged his disciples to do the same. And at the final moments of his life on earth, Jesus was praying. If Jesus, who himself is God puts so much value in prayer, how much more us mere humans?

Pray for your heart. Pray to God for strength to endure temptations. Pray to God for power to overcome your emotions. Ask God for wisdom in all your decisions. In every situation, prayer must be a priority. Prayer works in ways we cannot explain. It reminds us of God’s power and wisdom. It reminds us that we are weak and that we need to depend on God at all times.

In our daily pursuit of spiritual maturity, we cannot let our guard down. It doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian. We are all weak without God's power in our lives. The enemy is on the watch, making use of every opportunity to shake us. We must get occupied with godly things to avoid spending too much time in worldly things. Be consistent in your devotion. Get involved in a ministry. Do not give the devil a chance. Let's make use of our time wisely.

22 Draw a line

Proverbs 22:3 says, *“The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.”* God has given us the ability to know right from wrong. He has also given us his Word for guidance and instructions. And most of all, he has sent his Holy Spirit to be with us, to teach us and remind us of everything he has told us (John 14:26).

The problem is that we compromise. When we fail to stand for what we believe in and give in to what the world is saying. Know your stand. Let your yes be yes, and your no, no. Know your limits and practice discipline.

3. Stop scratching!

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

The heart doesn't really know what it wants, it's desires insatiable. The more you scratch, the more it itches. Stop

teasing yourself. If you're doing something that may lead you to compromise, stop it now. Don't let your heart rule over you. Don't let your emotions get the best of you.

4. Get help

In business terminology, accountability is defined *as the obligation of an individual or organization to account for its activities, accept responsibility for them, and to disclose the results in a transparent manner (Wikipedia)*. Same with our spiritual walk, we need to find people whom we can trust and be accountable to who will help us, rebuke us and support us in everything we do. “*As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another*” (Proverbs 27:17). We need each other to grow. But we must keep in mind that it is a decision and we have to be honest especially to our leaders if we are seeking accountability.

5. Follow His Heart

If you are familiar with King David, you know that God called him the man after his own heart (Acts 13:22). This was the key to his life. David is willing to do everything God wants him to do. Are we willing to do the same? If there's one heart we can trust, that's God's. As Christians, we don't say “follow your heart” but instead, “follow His heart”. Our hearts were never designed to be followed but to be Spirit-led.

LOOK: How do you find these suggestions? Are they applicable? Among the five, which one do you think is your weakest point? Why?

TOOK: What particular things must you avoid or stop doing from now on? What particular things must you start doing?

Take note of your members answers and make sure to follow them up throughout the week.

WORKS

For a few minutes, ask the group to pray for the person to their right. Then the leader shall close in prayer.

(This lesson is based on Rev. Jordan Escusa's sermon at Generation Congregation service on 11 February 2017).

Lesson 3

LOVE OF MONEY

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Timothy 6:10)

WELCOME

Give each of your members a clean sheet of paper. Ask them to list down all of their material possessions as of this moment (i.e. savings, gadgets, clothes, shoes, books, etc.). Give them enough time to think and write down as many items as possible. Next, tell them that if they are to die tomorrow, to whom shall they give all of the things they have written down. Give them time to reflect and complete their will. Ask some (if the group is too big) volunteers to share their *will* to the group.

This simple activity reminds us that nothing is permanent in this world and that we cannot take anything with us the moment we die. But in Christ, we can find satisfaction that lasts for eternity.

WORSHIP

Lead the group in prayer. The group may sing “Enough” by Barlow Girls.

WORD

HOOK: What do you think is the most expensive thing you’ve bought?

BOOK: Wealth is morally neutral; there is nothing wrong with money, in and of itself. When money begins to control us, that’s when trouble starts.

1. Symptoms of Loving Money

Here are some symptoms that we are becoming so in love with money and possessions. Let us use these to measure ourselves and where we are right now. This is very important, particularly because we live in a very materialistic world. If you have one of these characteristics, the Scripture verses may help you as you move forward to change.

a. An obsession with becoming rich

“Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction” (1 Timothy 6:9)

b. A discontented spirit

When we are gripped with the desire for more and our hearts are being eaten by greed, we need to step back and make a self-evaluation. Although there is a healthy dose of discontentment in order to leave room for improvement, when we begin to complain about our financial status become bitter about our status, we may be traversing the wrong road.

“Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless” (Ecclesiastes 5:10)

c. Living outside your means

This means spending more than you can afford. Having a credit card is both a blessing and a curse. If you are not careful, you may bury yourselves under a pile of debt. Make sure that you budget properly. Accept what you can afford.

“There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man swallows it up” (Proverbs 21:20)

d. You are known to be greedy

“A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold” (Proverbs 22:1)

e. Materialism

“I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes” (1 Timothy 2:9)

f. Regular conflicts because of money

“If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain” (1 Timothy 6:3-5)

g. You forget your main source

“But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today” (Deuteronomy 8:18)

2. Ways How to Unlove Money

In order to be completely devoted to God, we need to allocate money its proper place in our lives. Money is important, but it should not take the place of God at the center of our existence. It should not be the primary consideration in our decision-making about ministry, relationships, career, and others.

Here are some ways we can do to unlove money.

a. Practice cheerful giving

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7)

God does not demand anything from us. He prefers that we give willingly out of the abundance of our hearts. For us to become cheerful givers, we must have an attitude of gratitude; not forgetting all the blessings (material or not) that God has showered upon us and learning to share such to those in need.

b. Accountability partner

Money is not an easy thing to handle. Not that it's complicated but because our hearts are deceitful. We get easily swayed by peer pressure and we tend to keep up with what's the latest fad. We need someone we can trust and who we know is a good steward and disciplined enough to guide us with money matters.

c. Honor your source of blessings

“Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops” (Proverbs 3:9)

“Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God” (Exodus 23:19)

God deserves the best, not the leftovers. When we make it a practice to set apart what belongs to God first before making any personal spending, our hearts are being disciplined to

prioritize the Lord over our wants and needs. We must love the giver more than the gift.

d. Don't feed the greed

“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15)

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5)

Live within your means. Stop getting more than what you need. Satisfying the human wants is an endless chase. There is nothing in this world that can meet our greatest need.

e. Be content

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want” (Philippians 4:12)

Happy are those who get what they want but blessed are those who find contentment in what they have. Stop looking at your neighbor's plate and fill your heart with thanksgiving.

f. Store up treasures in heaven

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so

uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life” (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

Don't live your life for gold. Live for the One who can take you to a place where gold is just for feet to walk on.

g. Submit to Jesus as your only Master

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24)

God wants us to own money, but He doesn't want the money to own us. He wants us to control money, not for money to control us.

LOOK: Among all the given symptoms, what are you guilty of or struggling the most?

TOOK: What particular things would you like to start doing that will help in guarding your heart from the love of money?

Take note of your members answers and make sure to follow them up throughout the week.

WORKS

Encourage everyone to find an accountability partner within the group and make a commitment to be accountable with their tithes and offering.

Ask everyone for their personal prayer requests then lead the group in prayer.

(This lesson is based on Rev. Jordan Escusa's sermon at Generation Congregation service on 25 February 2018).