

How To Guard Your Heart

- *Many of Jesus' teachings, as well as the rest of the apostolic writings of the New Testament, directly or indirectly focus on our hearts.*
- *The Greek word for heart is καρδία (kardia) and it is used over 30 percent more often than the word soul, signifying the importance of the heart.*
- *Both the Old and New Testaments are filled with references to the heart as well as instructions about how to maintain a good heart and warn of the consequences if we do not.*

Matthew 5:8 (NKJV)

⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

- *The first time the word heart is used in the New Testament is in Matthew 5:8 and it is in reference to the blessing of having a pure or clean heart.*
- *One of the great blessings of having a pure heart is “for they shall see God.”*
- *There are many aspects of “seeing God” that can be understood by the blessing of Matthew 5:8, but one which powerfully impacts our daily lives is found in Titus 1:15.*

Titus 1:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.

- *“To the pure all things are pure” – It is amazing that when a Christian's heart is pure and free from bitterness and defilement, then faith, hope, love, and thanksgiving flow out of their heart—even in the midst of the most difficult circumstances.*
- *“but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure” - However, when a Christian has allowed impurity and selfishness to defile their heart, then they are blind to God's blessings in their lives. No matter how wonderful their life is, they are incapable of being truly satisfied or thankful.*
- *Therefore, the key for a Christian to be filled with thankfulness and peace is not for their circumstances to improve, but for their hearts to be purified.*

- *When our hearts are pure, then wherever we look we will see God's faithfulness and blessings in our lives.*
- *Corrie ten Boom, a Christian who was imprisoned for hiding Jews in occupied Holland during World War II, learned to be able to see God's hand of provision and faithfulness even in the midst of a Nazi death camp.*
- *In contrast to Corrie's response to adversity, some Christians who live in the freedom and luxury of the western countries are incapable of being thankful to God. They fail to see His goodness and faithfulness even when they enjoy good health and the comforts of having a place to live and food to eat.*
- *"Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God." – When our hearts are pure, the circumstance of life will be incapable of obscuring our view of God's faithfulness and beauty.*
- *The unbelieving ask, "Where is God?" with a closed fist of defiance, while the pure in heart ask, "Where are You God?" with a heart of thanksgiving, an open hand ready to receive, and eyes looking to see Him even in the midst of whatever painful circumstances they may face.*
- *The unbelieving look at creation and ask, "Where is God?" with an impure heart of skepticism, while believers look at creation and the miracle of life with a heart filled with awe.*
- *Skepticism never sees the miraculous—it only sees unexplainable events.*
- *When our hearts are pure we see God's faithfulness and His guiding hand even in the smallest events in our lives. When we are discontent we fail to see His faithfulness even when He divides the Red Sea for us.*

Acts 7:54–60 (NKJV)

⁵⁴When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.

⁵⁵But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,

⁵⁶and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

⁵⁷Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord;

⁵⁸and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

⁶⁰Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

- *The story of the murder of Stephen, the first Christian martyr recorded, is a wonderful example of “blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”*
- *“When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth” – Stephen, whose heart was pure, didn’t focus on the hatred and vile words being flung at him by his persecutors, but instead he “gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”*
- *In the midst of this hostility, Stephen didn’t rebuke or curse them in return. He looked up to heaven and saw an open vision of God’s glory.*
- *Stephen didn’t allow his persecutors’ hatred to embitter him or defile his heart. Instead, he directed their attention to God and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”*
- *In the midst of all the hatred and hostility directed toward him, instead of seeing evil and hateful men, Stephen saw the glory of God.*
- *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” accurately describes Stephen’s experience. If asked how he was feeling surrounded by a murderous crowd he would have responded, “Glorious!”*
- *In sharp contrast to Stephen seeing God’s glory in the midst of evil circumstances and hateful men, the men, whose hearts were defiled with bitterness and envy, couldn’t see the glory of God and didn’t even want to hear about it. “Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord.”*
- *Stephen’s heart not only remained pure while they were stoning him to death, he even demonstrated God’s love for his persecutors. “Then he knelt down and*

cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

- *Some may look at the events of that day when Stephen, still a young man whose life and ministry was cut short by a raving mob who stoned him to death, as not such a good day.*
- *However, I am totally convinced that Stephen’s response would be, “It was a most glorious day.” First of all he finished his ministry strong and brought glory to God; second he entered into the presence of God in heaven; and third his life and death impacted a man whom God would use to reveal the full extent of the mystery of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, “And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.”*
- *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” – What others would have seen as tragic, Stephen saw as glorious as he beheld the glory of God and the Son of Man standing up from His throne to greet him into eternity as an overcomer and one who would be seated with Christ on His throne forever.*

Matthew 5:28 (NKJV)

²⁸But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

- *The first time the word heart is mentioned in the New Testament it is in relationship to the blessing of having a pure heart. The second mention of the word heart contains a warning for those who have an impure heart.*
- *Sin is really a heart issue and is not restricted to one’s actions.*
- *Legalistic people who always condemn others for their actions are totally blind to their own sins of pride, selfishness, and unthankfulness. We see the speck in another’s eye, but miss the log in our own.*
- *Sin is not rooted in our actions, but in the condition of our heart, so the remedy for lasting change and true purity is not found in simply changing our actions. We need to confess our sin and ask God to purify and transform our hearts.*

Matthew 24:4–12 (NKJV)

⁴And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you.

⁵For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.

⁶And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

⁷For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.

⁸All these are the beginning of sorrows.

⁹“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake.

¹⁰And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.

¹¹Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.

¹²And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

- *Reading Matthew 24 is like reading the headlines of today’s newspaper. There is an exponential escalation in the number of wars, conflicts, and terrorism in the world. In verse 7 where Jesus spoke of nation rising against nation, the word for nation is the Greek word *ethnos*, meaning that ethnic groups will rise against each other. We see this in the Middle East, in the Ukraine, and in Africa. Yet Jesus said, “all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.”*
- *False religions and cults are springing up everywhere. Famines, pestilence, and natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis are occurring all over the world. New diseases are discovered each day, and many diseases thought to be curable or eradicated are making a comeback. But these are only a sign that things are going to get worse for “all these are the beginning of sorrows.”*
- *As the times worsen the Church will experience greater and greater persecution.*
- *Persecution has always been interwoven into the experience of true followers of Jesus Christ, both historically and biblically.*
- *“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake.” - I believe persecution will come to the Church even in countries where no persecution previously existed.*
- *However, this persecution will not come just from the outside, but from within the Church as “many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.”*

- *A tide of false teachings and prophecies will try to come against the Church to erode the biblical foundation of truth as, “many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.”*
- *The greatest threat to followers of Jesus Christ is “because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”*
- *The enemy of our souls wants to rob us of our first love for God and His Word and defile our hearts with bitterness, compromise, and lust.*
- *Even now we see many believers and churches compromising the truth of God’s Word, with truths once thought unshakeable tossed out, and replaced by ungodliness and confusion.*

Proverbs 4:23 (NKJV)

²³Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.

- *One of the most important things we can do as followers of Jesus Christ to protect ourselves from sliding into an abyss of immorality and confusion is to learn how to guard and watch over our hearts.*
- *Carelessness and negligence over the condition of our hearts is how the enemy has gotten a foothold into many Christians’ lives, with the foothold becoming a stronghold, which leads to bondage, shame, and confusion.*
- *The Bible teaches us how to keep or watch over our hearts, so it is important to understand what the Bible actually means when it refers to the heart.*

Acts 7:51(NKJV)

⁵¹“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.

- *In Stephen’s stirring address to the Jewish religious leaders, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he made a statement that provides us with some important insights into the heart.*
- *God uses three parts of the body to give us an understanding of our spiritual heart.*
- *The neck, the physical heart, and the act of circumcision.*

- *God created us in such a way physically that we could have a better understanding of how He created us spiritually.*

1 John 2:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

- *The three sources of sin: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life seem to line up with the three analogies of the spiritual heart; circumcision, the physical heart and the neck.*
- *As we study these three parts of the body we can learn how God wants to transform our hearts so they are pure, and how to guard our hearts to keep them pure.*
- *The first example we will look at is the neck.*
- *Often, when Israel rebelled against God's Laws and stubbornly resisted His direction and leading, He referred to them as being "stiff-necked."*
- *The neck is what supports and positions the head and ultimately directs the course of the body.*
- *When riding a horse, the rider directs the horse using the reins and as he turns the horse's head the horse turns its neck. We have to set our minds and sights on a new direction.*
- *If someone is stiff-necked they resist direction and reflect the characteristics of disobedience, stubbornness, and rebellion.*
- *Being stiff-necked implies an unwillingness to change the course or direction of our lives to conform to God's will.*
- *A proud person will never want to admit his or her needs, failures, or mistakes and will continue on the direction they have set no matter how destructive the path they have chosen.*
- *Being stiff-necked relates to the root sin of the pride of life.*

- *The way we overcome the pride of life and a stiff-necked heart is by no longer seeking to please ourselves, but seeking to please God and seeking to serve others.*

Romans 15:3 (NKJV)

³For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.”

- *Jesus never sought to please Himself, but always sought to please the Father. Jesus’ love for us motivated Him to serve us by saving us even at the spiritual, physical, and emotional expensive of suffering on the cross.*
- *The greatest prayer of surrender and example of yielding to the will of God is seen as Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane as He faced the cross and the most horrible death in all eternity. “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” (Matthew 26:29)*
- *We crucify the pride of life and the sin of entitlement and maintain a heart free from rebellion and self-will by constantly seeking to please God and serve others.*
- *We are thankful to God when things work out the way we would want. And if they don’t we are still thankful to God for His faithfulness.*
- *The pride of life is the worship of self, so when we bow our neck to God, humble ourselves, and worship Him, we are freed from pride.*
- *Let us pray that we will no longer have a proud stiff-necked heart that resists the Holy Spirit, but a heart that is humble and fully yielded to the will of God.*
- *The second analogy that we will look at is the physical heart.*
- *The physical heart keeps the body alive and in many ways can be seen as the center of life for the body.*
- *Similarly, the spiritual heart is the central part of the soul which motivates life and contains our deepest desires.*

- *Often the Bible refers to those deep desires as our “heart’s desires” as in Psalm 20:4. “May He grant you according to your heart’s desires and fulfill all your purposes.”*
- *In Romans 10:1 Apostle Paul expressed how deeply he desired Israel to be saved, with the words “my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.”*

Matthew 6:21 (NKJV)

²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

- *The heart is the treasure chest of the soul and it is the part of the soul that contains those things most precious to us.*
- *We can see how the heart relates to the root sin of the lust of the eyes.*
- *Covetousness is one of the great sins trying to steal the hearts of God’s people away from Christ.*
- *Especially in these end times with unimaginable developments in technology and extravagant wealth around us, covetousness is gripping even many of the people of God.*
- *The warning to the seventh church in Revelation, which in many ways can be seen in reference to the Church in these end times, “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.” (Revelation 3:17).*
- *Our hearts become defiled because we no longer treasure the things of God, but long for the things of this life as if they were treasures worthy defiling ourselves for.*
- *Since the heart is the treasure chest of the soul where we keep those things we value most highly, it can be understood that the heart is always the part of the soul that is god-ward and always seeks to serve our god.*
- *That god may be the True and Living God or may be false gods.*

Matthew 12:35 (NKJV)

³⁵A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.

- *We must be very watchful what kind of treasures we store in our heart for they will determine which god we will serve and what kind of fruit our lives will produce.*
- *Those gods are not restricted to materialism and the love of money. They can be extended to the lust of the flesh in the areas of sexual immorality, drug and alcohol addictions, and innumerable other “treasures.” We will serve them faithfully even at the cost of our health, families, and even our lives. We will serve our gods tirelessly day and night, because the heart is always directed godward, even if our god is a false god.*
- *However, if our hearts are pure and we love Jesus Christ with our whole heart and above everything else, we will tirelessly serve Him and seek to draw closer to Him.*
- *When a Christian backslides it is because they have allowed their eyes to wander to something else that has captivated their hearts and has become their treasure and their god.*
- *The lust of the eyes is the worship of things and the solution is to be content with God’s provision, because He is our provision independent of what we have or do not have.*
- *To guard our hearts in terms of the lust of eyes is to be watchful in everything we see and hear and to keep Jesus as our only treasure.*
- *The third analogy that we will look at is the act of circumcision.*

Romans 2:29 (NKJV)

²⁹but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

- *Why would God use the physical act of circumcision to provide an example of how to purify the heart?*

Deuteronomy 30:6 (NKJV)

⁶And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

- *Even in the Old Testament there is a correlation between circumcision and the spiritual heart.*
- *For us to be able to truly love God we must have circumcised hearts.*
- *Scripture speaks of at least two major functions of the spiritual heart that can be compared to the physical part of the body which is circumcised.*
- *The heart is the source of life.*

Proverbs 4:23 (NKJV)

²³Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.

- *The heart is the part of the soul that produces new life. The male organ is the part of the body responsible for reproduction to produce new life.*

Romans 10:9–10 (NKJV)

⁹that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

¹⁰For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

- *When we make a confession of faith in Christ originating from the heart, it produces salvation—the new birth.*
- *A person can never receive Christ and be born again from a purely intellectual response. The heart must be involved.*
- *When we see someone truly respond to the Gospel message and receive Christ it is because the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts and they realize they are a sinner in need of a Saviour.*
- *It is through the heart that the soul is cleansed from sin.*

1 John 1:9 (NKJV)

⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us

from all unrighteousness.

- *Repentance may involve the intellect, but it is always initiated from a heart that has been convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit.*
- *It is from our heart that we confess our sin and so we are not only forgiven, but we are cleansed from all unrighteousness.*
- *The male organ is the part of the body that eliminates waste products, so they do not build up or the body will become toxic.*
- *If we do not continually confess our sins and unrighteousness we will soon become spiritually toxic.*

Deuteronomy 10:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.

- *Circumcision is a picture of the heart being freed from the lust of the flesh.*
- *Just as in physical circumcision a piece of flesh is removed from the body, so are fleshly desires cut away from our spiritual hearts, so we can serve God in true holiness.*
- *We can see how having a circumcised heart can be analogist to dealing with the lust of the flesh as the flesh must be cut away.*
- *Just as the male organ can be a source of fleshly lusts, our hearts must be freed from lusts.*
- *Just as circumcision does no harm to the body, having our hearts circumcised does no harm to the soul.*
- *Just as it can be painful when physical circumcision takes place, it can be painful when we need to circumcise our hearts and remove fleshly lusts from our hearts.*
- *By studying what the Bible teaches about circumcision we can gain insights into how the heart is circumcised.*

Romans 4:11 (NKJV)

¹¹And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith

which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,

- *A circumcised heart is a picture of a heart that is right before God.*
- *For a person to be circumcised he must allow his most private parts to be exposed.*
- *We must come to God and confess our sins and be real with God. He already knows them.*
- *We need to be accountable to others and be willing to confess our sins one to another and to be transparent. (James 5:16)*

Ephesians 6:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

- *We are not left naked with the shame of our sins. Once the flesh has been removed we are clothed with righteousness and truth.*
- *The lies of the flesh are replaced by the truth of God.*

Leviticus 12:3 (NKJV)

³And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

- *In the Bible the number 8 is associated with new beginnings and the number 8 relates to our new birth.*
- *Our cleansing from sin and the removal of our fleshly ways occurs through our new birth and not by our self-effort.*
- *A child at eight days old does not experience shame when he is circumcised.*
- *When we come to Christ and openly confess our sins and failures, we become conscious not of our failures, but of His love and mercy toward us.*
- *It is also the time when the body is optimized to promote rapid healing.*

- *When God circumcises our hearts it does not leave wounds or scars, it brings full healing.*
- *We come to God with our failures and sins not from the point of view of a condemned sinner, but as His son or daughter. Through our new birth in Christ we can be cleansed and set free from all our failures and the pain of our past.*
- *If our hearts are free from sinful habits and influences it will produce great delight in our souls, but if our hearts are subject to the lusts of the flesh, we will experience terrible pain, sorrow, and inner turmoil.*
- *Circumcision is removing the flesh, so we are more and more sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit.*
- *We must allow the Holy Spirit to circumcise our hearts, so we are no longer driven or controlled by fleshly desires and lusts.*
- *The pride of life is the worship of self and we must learn to worship Christ with humility and servanthood which will produce character.*
- *The lust of the eyes is the worship of things and we must learn to worship Christ with contentment for His provision which will produce satisfaction.*
- *The lust of the flesh is the worship of comfort and pleasure and we must learn to worship Christ with thanksgiving which will produce joy.*

2 Chronicles 16:9 (NASB95)

⁹“For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars.”

- *God seeks those whose hearts are completely His, so that He may manifest His power and glory through them.*
- *God seeks those who are free from the pride of life, have hearts totally submitted to His will, and who live fully according to His Word.*
- *God seeks those who are free from the lust of the eyes so the only treasure in their hearts is Jesus Christ.*

- *God seeks those who are free from the lusts of the flesh, whose hearts have been circumcised and who can serve Him in purity.*