

## Gleanings from the Book of Proverbs: Keep Your Heart

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 4:23-27

### **Why is the Book of Proverbs so important – so valuable a tool to be used regularly in my life?**

The Book of Proverbs belongs to a group of books in the Bible that are called “Wisdom Literature / Poetical Books” (Job – Song of Solomon). These books are philosophical yet practical. They are designed to reason with you about the way your mind and heart relate to God and to this world. They inspire self-examination, meditation, prayer, decision, and action. In particular, the Book of Proverbs has no historical narrative. Proverbs apply to any time, location, and situation. They are usually succinct statements that penetrate the mind, linger in the heart, and seemingly reappear to us during various situations in our life (Proverbs 2:1-11; 6:20-23).

Proverbs 4:23 tells us to **“Keep** (*“watch, guard, preserve, protect”*) **your heart with all diligence** (*“above all else”*) **for out of it** (*the heart*) **are the issues of life** (*out of it flow the springs of life*).” Prosperous, productive living – even surviving depends on what we do with our hearts. The heart is often seen as the source of good or evil in the lives of people (Deuteronomy 6:4-6; Psalm 119:2, 10-11; Jeremiah 17:9-10; Matthew 12:34-35; 15:18-19). So, how shall a person keep / protect their heart? The avenues which reveal a person’s heart (thoughts, words, actions) are the same avenues in which the heart can be attacked and degraded. In John Bunyan’s book, “The Holy War” there is the city of “Mansoul.” The city was ruled by a king named “Shaddai (representing God). This city was protected by strong walls and five gates: Ear Gate, Eye Gate, Mouth Gate, Nose Gate, and Touch Gate. These gates were vulnerable to attack from an enemy named “Diabolos” (representing the Devil). It is a challenging story to read. It sets the stage for what this lesson is about: That the heart is vulnerable to attack through the stimulus of what comes to our ears, eyes, and even what we taste, smell, or touch. We also must watch what we allow to come out of our mouths.

### **Let’s consider Proverbs 4:24-27.**

**Proverbs 4:24 – Guard your Mouth.** Consider a froward / crooked / perverse / devious / deceitful mouth. If we would protect our hearts, we must not enter into corrupt conversations and use our mouths to blaspheme, to curse, to use in vulgarity, to mock proudly, or to lie and slander. As we speak, we hear ourselves. We will either speak well, or we will speak in such a way as to be shameful. But, instead of being ashamed, we can harden our hearts as we speak, especially if others show approval. Anger can often take over our mouths and cause us to say hateful and foolish things that we might later regret. Our mouths can make our hearts proud and stubborn. See Ephesians 4:25,29; 5:1-4 cp. Psalm 131:2; 141:1-4.

**Proverbs 4:25 – Guide your eyes.** This should be more self-evident. We are stimulated by things that we gaze upon. We think, meditate, and contemplate when we gaze at something. Eve first looked upon the fruit before succumbing to the Devil’s temptation (Genesis 3:6). We are warned not to “look / gaze” at wine as it sparkles in the cup (Proverbs 23:31). Job made a covenant with his eyes, concerning lusting after women (Job 31:1 cp. Matthew 5:28). See Psalm 101:3; I John 2:15-16.

**Proverbs 4:26-27 – Give thought about your actions.** Where you go, what you do, and with whom you associate will affect your heart’s affections and loyalties. Pay attention to what you are doing. Don’t be a piece of driftwood in the ocean of life. See Psalm 1:1-3; 101:1-8 (Note: This is the testimony of a king); Proverbs 1:10; 6:12-19; 9:6 Isaih 59:1-8; Jeremiah 14:10; Hosea 4:10-11; I Corinthians 15:33; Galatians 5:13-26; Ephesians 5:1-21; II Timothy 2:14-23 cp. **Psalm 119:59.**

One more look at Proverbs 4:26-27

Vs. 26 – Plan and Prepare – A Holy life is done on purpose. It’s never by accident.

Vs. 27a – Pursue the Plan – Don’t drift.

Vs. 27b – Purify your progress – Reevaluate and make appropriate changes.

For further reading: “Keeping the Heart” by John Flavel (Christian Heritage / Christian Focus Publications).

## **Integrate the Book of Proverbs into your life and into your Bible study**

We have already noted that the thirty-one chapters of the Book of the Proverbs makes it conducive to reading a chapter a day for a whole month (You’ll need to do a little extra during the four months that have thirty days). Do this for many months – if not for the rest of your life! You want to saturate yourself with these powerful words of wisdom. They will live in your mind and heart and give you great comfort, warning, and instruction throughout your life.

Proverbs will also add insight to your study of the rest of the Bible. Many biographical / historical narratives can be an illustration for the principles found in the Proverbs. Proverbs can be used as a proof-text or conclusion for Biblical teaching. They will stick in your mind and in the minds of others as you “connect the dots” between the book of Proverbs and other books of the Bible.

Here are a few places to start connecting the dots: **The Book of James** is called “**The Proverbs of the New Testament.**” Both books recommend the blessedness of godly character, words and actions. They warn against that which will bring misery and will be condemned as abominable to the Lord. So, also with **The Sermon on the Mount** (Matthew 5:1 – 7:29). Especially note **The Beatitudes** (Matthew 5:3-12). See <https://bible.org/seriespage/44-sermon-mount>

Be sure to see the connections with the Book of Proverbs and the books of Psalms / Ecclesiastes.