

#1969—September 20, 2009—“Guard Your Heart”—12

[Gauger:] *Moody Presents* the Hall of Presidents.

[Stowell:] He says, “I’m not impressed. I want to see your heart.” We can have credentials stacked miles high and have a heart that is dysfunctional toward God.

[Gauger:] With a legacy look at the men who shaped the school that Moody founded, this is the Hall of Presidents from *Moody Presents*. I’m Jon Gauger, welcoming you to this very special broadcast that gives us a close-up look into the very heart of Moody’s seventh president, Dr. Joseph M. Stowell III. A second-generation pastor, Dr. Joe Stowell cast a vision for the Institute that urged us to reach farther and to dream bigger for the kingdom of God. It was Dr. Stowell, I remember, who always spoke of equipping the next generation of Christian leaders. It was Dr. Stowell who seemed to be almost consumed with what he referred to enthusiastically as “the cause of Christ.” But despite his success as an author, the demand that he enjoyed as a preacher and teacher, Dr. Stowell never lost sight of the things that God values. Better than most, Dr. Stowell understood and taught that it is not about our achievements; it’s about our personhood, who we are as followers of Christ. You know, I remember very clearly a chapel series in which he talked about personhood biblically week after week. So it’s no surprise that the message that we have selected for today’s broadcast is along those same themes. Guard Your Heart is the title of today’s message, from president’s chapel 1996. Join me now as we walk down the Hall of Presidents, listening to the seventh president of Moody, Dr. Joseph M. Stowell III.

[Stowell:] Both in the Old and the New Testament, the Hebrew word and the Greek word for *heart* carried the very same concepts and definition. Hebrew and Greek scholars teach us that these words basically deal with the center of you, the center of me. The heart is where I dream, and the heart is where I deliberate. The heart is where I decide. The heart is the springboard of my emotions. The heart is my will. The heart is my thought life. It is the very core of our being. The heart, your heart, my heart, is the authentic you. It is the authentic me. After we peel away all the masquerading, all the layers of what we’re trying to stack up so that we can be what we want people to think we are ... Peel away all of the layers, and when you get down to the naked core, the authentic you is there. That is what God’s Word speaks about when it says “heart.” It’s the authentic me. It’s the authentic you.

As the *Kittel Dictionary of New Testament Theology* says about *kardia*, this word in the New Testament, it makes a very important point that the heart is the place where God meets people. It is the very seat of my spirituality. When God invades the territory of my life, He is moving straight for my heart, for the authentic me. I find that a little convicting, because I would prefer that He would meet me on some other turf. As He begins to move into the arena of my existence, maybe some of us say, “Lord, check my creed. You know, me and Luther and Calvin and Wesley and all these guys ... I mean, we’re like *this*. And look. Look at my doctrinal statement, and look how I ...” And God says, “That’s very important,” and pushes it all aside, and He says, “Joe, I want to see your heart.” Because let’s face it ... We can have our creed all in order and have our heart be phenomenally dysfunctional.

Some of us may say, “Well, check out my credentials. I served Christ in public ministry since I was twenty-six, so that’s twenty-four straight years of running. There has been a lot of ... I’ve helped God by marrying them, burying them, birthing them into the kingdom, disciplining them, helping them to get over old habits and get into new habits. I’ve come to serve here as a resource in this student body and faculty, written a few books, spoken a couple of places, and

tried to be a good dad and a good husband.” I say, “Hey, Lord, wait, wait, wait, wait. Check out the credentials. What do You think?” I know every time He says, “I’m not impressed. I want to see your heart.” We can have credentials stacked miles high and have a heart that is dysfunctional toward God.

You say, “Oh, look at the consecration of my life. Look what I do and what I don’t do. I don’t drink, dance, smoke, chew, or go with girls that do. I do all these right things. I do everything, don’t do nothing, and man, God, I’ve got ... My consecration is, like, peerless!” And He says, “Convictions are important, and external righteousness may be important, but I’m not really impressed until I see your heart.” He pushes it all aside and says, “Let Me see your heart.”

In all of Scripture God is first and foremost concerned about my heart. It is where God meets me. My heart is the essence of my being. Those of you who are from mission fields as MKs and those of you being trained in missiology realize that if you go to a foreign field, particularly third-world countries, when you say “God meets you in your heart,” they don’t understand that, because they use words like “liver” or “kidneys.” As strange as they may seem, the truth is it’s not our physical heart we’re talking about, but every person on this globe understands that way down deep inside them somewhere is the real me. That’s the essence of our being.

So when this text says, “Above all else, guard your heart,” we need to know that’s a very critical call of Scripture. Notice what the text also says. Not just heart and understanding its priority, but it says, “From your hearts flow the wellsprings of life.” So it is not only the essence, but it is the source of all my expression. If you and I spend some time together, pretty soon I know a little bit about your heart, because the expressions of your life are rooted directly in your heart. “Guard your heart, for from it ...”

And this word *flows* is a word for ... As a spring bubbles forth and brings about a flowing river, your heart flows out of your life, your existence, and forms all of your life. And Scripture teaches that so straightforwardly. In Proverbs we learn that “as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Your heart is what is the expression of your life. That’s a very sobering statement, because a lot of us sense that our mind is an arena that we can privately protect, constructing playgrounds of thought, playgrounds of angry, bitter thoughts, torture chambers of thoughts of resentment, playgrounds of sexual fantasies. And we think since it’s that dark corner of my life that no one can ever see that we can get away with recess on playgrounds like that. Nothing can be further from the truth, because ultimately, eventually, what I let my mind think will be expressed through my life. The heart is not only our essence; it is the expression of life. It expresses itself.

Scripture also tells us that what you value in your heart will show up in what you value in life. In the Gospels Jesus Christ said, in Luke 12, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” So the things that you and I value at the heart level end up being where we dump the treasures of our lives. I can tell an awful lot about your heart by what you value. You can tell an awful lot about my heart by how I act in terms of my values. God says, “Let Me see the ledger of your checkbook. Let Me look at that, and I’ll know a lot about your heart.” Because our hearts express the values that we hold.

You say, “There are five things I would never do for God. I’m not going to be a missionary. I don’t care what He says. I’m not going to be ...” Do we not in our hearts value eternity and the cause of the gospel? The treasure of your time, the treasure of your life, the treasure of your financial resources ... Whatever they are, our hearts are an expression of the values we hold in them, and you can tell an awful lot about all of us by how we apply our values, and it will tell us what our hearts are like.

Or even our speech. Christ said on more than one occasion in the Gospels that the wicked's speech patterns were only a reflection of the problem that someone had a heart problem down deep inside. "For the mouth speaks," Christ said, "out of the overflow of the heart." Which means that this tongue is this little tattletale in my dentures. When I'm trying to hide stuff in my heart, sooner or later this little tattletale in my head starts telling on the real condition of my heart. If you're having trouble with your speech, like most of us do on occasion, maybe we ought to do some remediation at the heart level instead of just trying to bridle this tongue that's in our mouth.

All of that to say that you can't miss the fact that the heart is the very essence of you, and it is also the springing up and expression of what you are on the outside. Can you think of a more vital entity that you and I possess than this heart from which flows the wellspring of our lives? I don't think so. That's why God takes it so seriously.

So maybe we say, given the fact that our heart is the essence and the springboard of the expression of our life, what should we do? That's the beauty of this text. Notice what Proverbs 4:23 says is my responsibility. Number one, that I am to guard my heart. What's important to note here is that in the Hebrew, there is kind of a double dip in this exhortation, because he uses two words for "guard" and "protect." If we translated this literally, we'd say, "Above all else, guard ... guard your heart, for from it flow the wellsprings of life." It's kind of like an "I don't know that I can say this enough times" kind of thing. You've got to guard your heart.

And the two words that are synonyms in the Hebrew text do have some interesting nuances in their own right, because they are two different words. The one simply means to guard in this context: It means to watch very carefully; it means to protect; it means to keep something safe; it means to give oversight to it. In fact, it's the word that's used back in Genesis when God gave Adam and Eve the garden that He had created, and He told them, "Keep this garden." Watch over it. Give it oversight. Protect it. Take good care of it. Guard.

So the instruction to my heart is that I have a personal responsibility to keep, watch over, protect, and give oversight to my heart.

I want to say something parenthetically here. That's my responsibility. Isn't it interesting how we keep running around the kingdom trying to keep watch, protect, guard, and give oversight to everybody else's heart? I want you to think about that.

[Gauger:] A reminder that the message that you're listening to right now is part of a commemorative message series we've titled the Hall of Presidents. It's available at our Web site, moodypresents.org. Eighteen historic messages on nine CDs: the Hall of Presidents. Click on the button when you go to moodypresents.org. Now part two of Dr. Joe Stowell's message, Guard Your Heart, from president's chapel 1996.

[Stowell:] All of Scripture is meant to be taken very personally. I have no control over your heart. I have no control over your heart, or yours, or yours. I have no control over your heart. There is only one heart that I can function with, and that's mine. And God says to me, "Stowell, if you'll just kind of take care of yours, I'll take care of everybody else's." It's my responsibility to guard my heart.

The second word that's used in this double-dip emphasis here has a little more intensity to it. You might say that the first word is what we are to do; the second word gives some nuances on what we're to do in terms of guarding. This is where the text I read from the New American

Standard gets “with all diligence.” It means while you’re guarding, it’s just not this casual, like, “All right, I’ll watch over it.” It is that we guard with all diligence. It is a very intense call to the guarding of our hearts. In fact, it’s interesting that in one place in the Old Testament this word is used of the keeper of a vineyard. It was his stewardship to watch over this vineyard, to protect it from thieves and wild animals that would trample it, or the enemies of the vineyard owner who would like to come and depreciate his business by ravaging his vineyard. So a keeper of the vineyard was hired, and it uses this word in the context that he builds a hut at the gate of the vineyard that he might keep it with diligence. In other words, he set up residence there, lived there twenty-four hours a day, decided to stay there whether it was raining, snowing, sleeting, hailing, or whatever. He set up residence to do diligence in keeping his heart. Hence the New American Standard translation, “with all diligence keep your heart.” Guard your heart.

So, given that, we have to say one more thing then. OK, well, how do I do that? This is one of these verses that just gives us this important exhortation but never fills us in with process. When you hit a verse that says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for from it come the wellsprings of life,” that’s a principle. You mark it. You say, “OK, my duty is to guard with intensity, with all diligence, to set up a hut by my heart and guard it.” But we’re still saying, “All right, OK, how do I do that, and what would that mean?” Then when the verse doesn’t give it to you, you know that God never leaves us hanging, so you begin to move into a broader sense and search the Scriptures. Does the Bible speak any place about how I guard my heart? And the answer is yes, and there probably are many ways that we do it, but let me mark two.

I’m referencing in the New Testament in Matthew 22, where the Pharisees came to Christ and said to Him, “Master, what is the greatest commandment of the Law?” which, as we know, the text says they asked Him this question hoping to trip Him up. And He says to them, “The greatest commandment in the Law is this”—and you know this; He quoted from Leviticus—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with ...” Not segments, not parts of. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.”

You say, “What does that have to do with guarding my heart? Everything. Let me explain. The word *love* there is the word *agape*, which doesn’t necessarily mean you always have to feel good about God. There are some days we don’t feel good about anything, and we’ve all had days like that. *Agape* love is a commitment to yield to another, to yield rightfully to another’s needs, to another’s agendas, to show concern for. In the context of loving God, that means that one thing I do is I take my heart and I give it away. I give it to Him and say, “Father, You have all of my heart. I give You my dreams, my deliberating processes, my decisions. I give You my will. I ask You to help me with my emotions that are so messed up some of the time. Father, here is my whole heart, the whole thing, and I yield it to You as an act of love.”

And within the context of *agape*, the word meaning is a yieldedness, a surrendering to. In Ephesians 5 where it tells me as a husband, “Husbands, love your wives,” it means that I have to surrender to the needs of my wife. I yield my time, my resources, my self and surrender to the structure of her needs. It’s the very same way here. I yield my whole heart to God. I surrender everything at the core of my being to Him, and I give it away. We guard our hearts by giving our heart away to someone who can manage it and guard it better than we can.

I just want to tell you this: If God is the manager of your heart, if you’ve surrendered your heart to Him, He will guard it from all evil, from the intrusion of everything that would hurt, destroy, debilitate, discount, erode all that you are. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.” You give it away to the One who will keep it better than we could ever keep it ourselves. That’s a commitment. That’s a commitment you need to make on a regular basis. It’s a commitment we

keep wanting to drag back. We say, “No, I want to do my dreams myself. I want to do these deliberations myself. I think I’ll do my own will here. I’ll ...” And every time we do that, we cease to guard our heart. Because left to its own, as the prophet Jeremiah said, our hearts are “deceitfully wicked.” Who can understand the tyranny of your own heart when you keep it for yourself? The best thing to do with your heart if you really want to guard it is to give it away. Give it to the safety deposit hands of the Father. He’ll manage it just right.

Secondly, once you’ve given it away, it still resides within you; you’ve just got a new manager of it all. You set up little huts outside the gates that things invade your heart. Luke 15 says the Word of God, when it is sewn, sometimes falls on good and noble hearts. That’s a wonderful statement. It falls on good and noble hearts, and these hearts take the Word of God and plant it, retain it, remember it. And from it grows the fruits of righteousness. In John 17 Jesus Christ said, “I don’t want to take them out of the world, but Father, I pray that You would set them apart. Keep them safe through the sanctification of Your truth. Your Word is truth.” I’ve come to realize, given the fact that if I would have a good and noble heart, I must be receptive to the Word of God. And if I am to be set aside in this world that would destroy my heart, I must be set aside to His use by His Word that is the sanctifying power.

And it works like this: We decide to set up huts to guard the vineyard of our heart at all the gates and entryways. The Word of God works like that for us. It creates grids at our eye gate. It creates grids at our ear gate. It creates grids at our thought gate. For those of us who have filled our lives with the Word of God, who with good and noble hearts have received it, there is a sentinel at the gates of our heart that says, “Hmm. Let’s see. The lyrics to that song, or what you’re watching on that movie now ... They don’t have permission to get in, because they violate everything that’s true. That thought that what you might do with your time or your will ... that thought doesn’t get in here, because I’ve set a guard on my thought life.”

This summer, as we spread out all over the globe, all of us will be away from here, many times away from Christian friends and away from authorities. I just want you to know, if your life has been just externalized, how vulnerable we are. But if we have decided to guard our hearts with the Word of God, no matter where you are or who is with you or who isn’t with you, the Word of God and your submission to Him stand as a guardian at the gate. And it just doesn’t let stuff in.

So how do you guard your heart? You give it away. You set up guardhouses of God’s truth to protect and never let anything in that defiles it. I think as we spread out we need to know that the most precious thing we take out of here is our hearts. It is the essence of what we are and expresses all that we are at the core. God has said, “Guard it. Give it away. Set up sentinels, and use the truth to filter out anything that would destroy the process.”

[Gauger:] From 1996, Dr. Joe Stowell with Guard Your Heart. You know, as you listen, don’t you get a sense of the heart of this man, the sense of his passion for true spiritual, godly living? You know, this message is a part of our collection that we have titled the Hall of Presidents. It’s available right now at our Web site, moodypresents.org—eighteen commemorative messages on nine CDs. You’ll hear D. L. Moody’s actual voice recorded in the late 1800s. You’ll hear a message from R. A. Torrey, his actual voice, Is the Bible the Word of God? Here’s a man that was born in the 1800s, defending with clarity and power the authenticity and reliability of Scripture. You’ll hear from Will Houghton and James M. Gray, Dr. Culbertson, Dr. Sweeting, and of course messages from Dr. Stowell, as you’ve heard today. We’re calling it again the Hall of Presidents. I strongly encourage you to check it out when you visit moodypresents.org. Just look for the little button there called Hall of Presidents. Next week on the broadcast Dr. Joe Stowell returns with a message on stewards of God’s treasure. This is one of the most sought-

after sermon CDs in Dr. Stowell's tenure at Moody Bible Institute. I'm Jon Gauger, saying thanks for listening. Join us then right here on *Moody Presents*, the Hall of Presidents.