



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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Jumpstart # 1967

Proverbs 4:23 *“Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.”*

This early section of Proverbs is a father's instruction to his son. It's like a talk a dad would have before his child heads off to college. Reminders of things that the child has heard but one more time being reinforced. What follows is a series of simple reminders that are all connected to "watching over your heart."

- Put away a deceitful mouth (24)
- Look directly ahead of you (25)
- Watch the path of your feet (26)
- Avoid evil (27)

But our verse is the overriding principle in all of this. There are a series of things we gather from this principle.

First, each person is responsible for their heart and for the way that they turn out. The very idea of "watching over your heart" implies that there is something that a person can do to make sure it is safe. Why watch over, if things are beyond your control? What's the purpose if you can't change things?

Second, there are things that are heart healthy and things that destroy our hearts. We understand this physically. A regular diet of French fries, although they taste good, isn't good for our hearts. Likewise, there are things that helps our spiritual hearts and things that clog and hurt our spiritual hearts. Just as a person watches what they eat, we must "watch," the very word used here, what we put into our spiritual hearts. A steady diet of complaining, negativity, falsehoods, foul attitudes, corrupt language and it won't be long and we will have a serious heart problem. Simply showing up on Sunday morning church service won't erase all the bad stuff we have fed our hearts all week. It is no different than a person eating a bad diet and then at one meal, he drinks water. Do you think that one glass of water is going to make up for all the bad stuff you have put in you? Watch. That's the word. The concept is like a guard. I've been to the White House and have seen guards. I've been to Buckingham Palace and have seen guards. No one just walks through the gates. That doesn't happen. ID is checked. Metal detectors must be walked through. Schedules are checked. If you are not on the list and you are not invited and expected, you do not just go in. They are watching. They are guarding. They are protecting. Is it any different with our hearts? Do we allow just anything to pass through the gates? Anything that is blasphemous, obscene, offensive and counter to what we believe? Why would we let those things pass unnoticed and unchecked? Is it because a friend or family member says it? It is because a boss says it? It is because it's in the latest movie? Watch your heart. Don't fall asleep at the post.

(OVER)

Third, Out of our hearts is what forms our character. Our attitudes are shaped by what is in our hearts. Our beliefs come from our hearts. So with anything coming in unchecked, is it any wonder that some have real problems with their mouths. They say things that they shouldn't. They repeat things that others have no business knowing. Those that shine so well in character, have spent years developing and feeding their heart the very things that will make it strong, spiritual and pleasing to the Lord. Those that put little thought into this will have a character that causes trouble and is unsteady. You want to be a strong Christian? It's possible. But you have to pay attention to what you are feeding your soul. Some spend more time chasing their doubts than they do feeding their faith. Some spend too much time with critics, doubters and wolves in sheep clothing, that they are not sure what they believe. If you don't take care of your spiritual heart you will not have a positive spiritual life. It's that simple.

Fourth, the very idea of watching means somethings are accepted and some things are turned away. You will not do what everyone else is doing. You may not even do what other Christians are doing. You know your heart. You know what works. You know where you want to be. So, there are things you are going to steer clear of because they will not help you. There are things that you know are good and beneficial, so you will embrace those. You may not keep up or even watch the TV shows that others are talking about. You may not read the hottest books on the market. You may not have all the apps and do all the things that people declare, "you have'ta do this." No, you don't. You watch over your heart.

Fifth, no one else can do this for you. Preachers and shepherds can give you verses and tell you all the benefits of praying, and letting your mind dwell upon holy and right things. We can sit in amazing Bible classes and learn the value of watching over our hearts, but then immediately go home, and watch something on TV that is just the opposite of what we have learned. It fills our minds and hearts with fear, doubts and negative thoughts about others. We reach out to others for help. They pray with us and for us. They suggest things to do and things to read. We are invited to be with some of the best spiritual people on earth. But if we are not watching our hearts, weeds will take it over and all of this will be to no positive benefit. One of the great concerns of elders is that too often they are praying and caring for the soul of a person more than that person cares about it. This father, in our Proverb, was telling his son to "watch" over his heart. Dad couldn't do it. Preachers can't do it. Elders can't do it. There are not enough sermons that will do it. Each of us has to do this ourselves. Satan's poison looks like appealing glitter to our eyes. We are attracted to it. It seems innocent. Unless we are careful. Unless we are watching, we will consume that poison and then that poison consumes us.

Finally, the word "diligence" is found in our verse. Watch over your heart with all diligence. Be diligent, is found in the N.T. Diligence means top priority. It means, "get to it." It doesn't mean, sooner or later, if I find the time, I'll do it. If you came home this evening, and someone left the water running and it has flowed over the sink and is filling the bathroom with water, you wouldn't wait until a commercial of the ballgame to turn the water off. It doesn't matter if it is the final game of the World Series, you'd tend to the mess in the bathroom. That takes top priority. We get that. It's the same with our hearts. Watch over them with diligence. Become thankful. Become kind. Become a servant. Become spiritual. How? Watching over your heart with diligence. That means, not every thing that pops in my head needs to be said. WATCH. That means I need to turn my eyes away from some things. WATCH. That means I must feed my faith. WATCH. Get to it and get to it now! Diligence.

We determine the hearts that we have. My late friend, Barbara Johnson, often wrote in her books, "Pain is inevitable, but misery is optional." You choose. You determine. You watch your heart.

Good thoughts for us to remember.

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)