

# *Guard Thy Heart*

By Karen M Gray

Our text this morning is taken from Proverbs 4:23

*"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." – NIV*

Other translations are as follows:

*"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." ESV*

*"Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life." – NLT*

*"Carefully guard your thoughts because they are the source of true life." – CEV*

Or TPT puts it this way:

*"So above all, guard the affections of your heart, for they affect all that you are. Pay attention to the welfare of your innermost being, for from there flows the wellspring of life." –TPT*

“Although most translations “*the issues of life,*” the Hebrew word **yasa** is actually “seasons,” especially springtime. Out of your heart flow the seasons of life. It is our hearts, not our ages or circumstances, that shape the seasons of our lives. If our hearts are tender to God, we can live in perpetual springtime.” – Brian Simmons footnote.

What does the Bible mean by our "heart"? Again, according to Dr Brian Simmons, the translator for the Passion Translation, the Hebrew word **levav** is the most common word for “heart.” It includes our thoughts, our wills, our discernment, and our affections. In fact if you type in the word “Heart” into any online Bible, it will become quickly obvious that this is so – i.e. that the heart is the seat of our thoughts, will/motivation, and our emotions.

Here are just a few well-known verses:

*"Anxiety in the **heart of man** causes depression, but a good word makes it glad." – NKJV*

*"Before destruction the **heart of a man** is haughty, and before honour is humility" – NKJV*

*"Delight yourself in the Lord and He shall give you the desires of your **heart**." – Psalm 37:4 NKJV*

*Mary carrying these things in her **heart** – (Luke 2:29; 2:51)*

*"Both the inward thought and the **heart of man** are deep." – Psalm 64:6 NKJV*

*"A merry **heart** does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones." –Proverbs 17:22*

*"A man's **heart** plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps." – Proverbs 16:19*

*"Hope deferred makes the **heart** sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life."* – Proverbs 13:12

*"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,  
Nor have entered into the **heart** of man  
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."* – 1 Corinthians 2:9

*"So let each one give as he purposes in his **heart**, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver."* – 2 Corinthians 9:7

*"The **heart** of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil."* – Proverbs 15:28

*"Wisdom rests in the **heart** of him who has understanding, but what is in the **heart** of fools is made known."* – Proverbs 14:33

Jesus, also spoke concerning the **heart of man**. It is the place where *treasures* are stored (Matthew 12:35; Luke 6:45),

*"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the **heart**, and they defile a man. For **out of the heart** proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."* – Matthew 15:18–19 NKJV

That is: *"things"* that we have stored in our hearts are our attitudes and beliefs, and these motivate us to speak and act. Naturally, anything that motivates us, is critical to the way we live our lives.

Further, the state of our heart is the ultimate description of who we truly are,

*"As in water face reflects face, so a man's **heart** reveals the man."* – Proverbs 27:19 NKJV

*"For as he thinks **in his heart**, so is he."* – Proverbs 23:7 NKJV

The state of our heart describes accurately the depth of our relationship with God, Himself. What God asks of us is that:

*"You shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."* – Mark 12:30 ESV (See also Matt 22:37 & Luke 10:27)

If God is not seated on the very throne in our hearts, if we have a creed rather than a relationship, we will fail to trust Him in times of crisis. We will endure for a time but ultimately give up because our faith rests in other things. Our hearts will fail because we choose to believe the circumstances, and the lies the enemy often envelops around those events. We may hold on to His promises for a time, but eventually will succumb to disappointments and doubts. For this reason, guarding our heart is of utmost importance – especially in times of trials! It is central to our faith and therefore, to endurance!

A guarded our hearts, is steadfast in the storms of life, because we have trust in the One whom we love. Nevertheless, if we do fail to hold on to faith – being beaten down by afflictions, or fail to love, or are so wounded we've shut our hearts down, the good news is

that God is in the "heart restoration" business! Yes, we have a responsibility to guard our hearts diligently - to not let anything unGodly take root there, but when we are facing trials and our hearts are wounded, or fail from lack of strength, it is God who brings healing.

*"Whom have I in heaven but You?*

*And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.*

***My flesh and my heart fail;***

***But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.***" - Psalm 73:25-26 NKJV

In fact, this is THE lesson that God wants us to learn: That in every situation we can trust Him with all we are because His love for us is enormous, true and unconquerable. When we eventually grasp the reality of lesson, our hearts will be totally steadfast. Then when trials come:

*"He will not be afraid of evil tidings;*

*His **heart** is steadfast, trusting in the LORD.*

*His **heart** is established;*

*He will not be afraid"* - Psalm 112:7-8 NKJV

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So from all of this discussion we can conclude that guarding our hearts is not merely a matter of thinking good thoughts, but guarding our emotions, and motivations as well. That is, we must watch with vigilance the gates of our mind, our will and our emotions to prevent unwanted guests taking up residence there.

## **The Mind Gate**

As mentioned, because we become what we think about ourselves, (i.e. "*For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.*" - Proverbs 23:7 NKJV) what we choose to think is important to our hearts and indicative of what we will become. This is why Paul instructs the Philippians,

*"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."* - Philippians 4:8 ESV

And again,

*"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."* - Romans 12:2 ESV

*"Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."* - Colossians 3:2 NKJV

*"I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not cling to me."* - Psalm 101:3 NKJV

What we read, hear, view, and then spend time thinking about, has the capacity to either shape us to look more like Jesus, ("***And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's***

***glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*** - 2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV - The word "contemplate" has the note: or "reflect" upon) or will conform us to the image of the world. Psalms reminds us,

*"How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.  
With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!  
I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."* - Psalm 119:9-11  
ESV

Obviously, it is the Father desire for us is the former. He is the author and finisher of our faith. We've been saved, made righteous, given a new life and a new identity, and given everything we need for life and Godliness (2 Peter 1:3). But He still needs to shape our character to look like Jesus. In this endeavour, we have the choice and privilege to work along side and partner with Him. Part of that work will include what we choose to put into our hearts and minds, and whom we choose to believe. We can transform our minds by filling them with what God says about us, and His instructions on how we should live - mostly by the Word of God - but also by meditating on good things as Paul describes, and the good examples of Godliness we witness in others.

Even though we may think we are very diligent with what we feed our minds, there are still times that the enemy will whisper thoughts into your minds - thoughts disguised as our own reckoning but designed especially to hit nerves and cause you to react. Remember that any hint of a lie mixed into the truth is still a lie, and any truthful fact that causes you to react negatively, is a seed for bad fruit to spring forth. Therefore, not all "truths" are good to broadcast to others. This then calls for extra vigilance and discernment.

**For example:** I was trying to extend the hand of friendship/fellowship to a couple in the church in an effort to show Godly love and to them. There was no other motive than that. As such I had invited them to dinner several times, and visited their house as well. However, this couple who were considered mature Christians, seemed very stand-off-ish, and non-reciprocating. Although I wondered about their cold reception, I was also contemplating how I might bridge the gap. Perhaps I could invite them to dinner. Then after one such visit, as I was getting into the car to go, I heard a voice say,

*"They don't really like you!"*

Of course, I realised immediately that the thought had to have been from a demon, but I also realised that those words were true. (As I stated above, just because something is a true fact, doesn't automatically mean that it is good!) They didn't like me at all! Perhaps I was unintentionally offensive, talked too much, or just clashed with their personalities. Whatever the reason, I felt as if there was nothing I could do to change the situation. They had made their feelings clear. It seemed so final! Needless to say that that's about the time I stopped visiting and reaching out to them. As if bitten by the dog I was feeding, I decided it better to give no more, and not to try again. Instead of continuing to love, I closed my heart to them. Yes, it was totally the wrong choice, but this example does illustrate the point. The words that pierced my mind were not fuelled by fiery emotion as some thought darts, but they contained enough "truth" to for me to take notice, and my agreement with that "truth" gave it license to invade my thoughts and ultimately my heart as I began to feel a little wounded by the revelation. I failed to recognise the way the enemy was sneaking negativity into my heart.

So how can you tell the difference between a demon disguised as an angel of light and the voice of the Holy Spirit when the words that are spoken are actually facts or truths? My old pastor back in Ballarat use to tell us that when paper money was still in use, bank tellers were taught to find forgeries not by handling or examining the fake notes, but by handling the real notes, day in and day out. Then when the fake note came into the bank, they would easily recognise it - the feel of it, the weight of it, the smell of it, and even the look of it. It's the same with the thoughts that come into your mind. If you spend time in the word of God, in prayer and in His presence, the voice of the enemy is very easily distinguishable.

*"But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." and "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." - John 10:2-5; 10:27 NKJV*

Knowing His voice will help you know the voices that are not God's quickly. I knew it had to be a demon. The problem was I agreed with what was said. Even if the revelation seems true, if it's from hell, we cannot afford to even contemplate it for a moment let alone agree with it. Of course, 90% of what the enemy says will be exposed when held in the light of the Word of God, but if it does ring of truth, the potential fruit should be the final give away. What will the end result be if you acted this "truth"? It is important, therefore, that we do not agree with any thought other than God's. Better to brush it off instantly, than to give it access to your mind (thoughts) and ultimately your heart! As the saying goes, *"The birds may circle and try to land on your head, but you don't have to let them nest there."*

Let's face it; you were designed to have Godly thoughts. 1 Corinthians 2:16 says *that we now have the mind of Christ*, and well able to hear and understand what the Holy Spirit teaches. We were created for this. Jesus said that another voice we will not follow (John 10:5 above). Why? Because we know the Master's voice and easily recognise other voices as not His.

This means that not only in every day life but also in those times of crisis, the Holy Spirit can and does, bring to mind those Scriptures and testimonies we have meditated upon, both to encourage and to thwart the lies of the enemy. Because we have built up our faith - our trust and assurance in God - (Jude 1:20), we can endure any crisis and even praise God in the midst of the fire. We have armour coated our minds and hearts in the love and knowledge of who our God is and who we are in His sight.

### **The Emotion Gate**

Next is guarding our emotions. You may think that's absurd. How can you do that? Well it can be done. It just takes practice, and further, it's something we must do to protect our hearts.

For example: when we are injured emotionally, we may have a tendency to want to get even, or at least to strike back. Following through with these negative thoughts and inclinations only take us down the road of unforgiveness, bitterness and even to hate. These things ensnare our hearts because they are not of God but from hell itself! However, Jesus gives us the remedy:

*"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." - Matthew 5:44 NKJV*

*"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you." - Luke 6:27-28 NKJV*

That is: **love, bless, do good, and pray** for those who wrong us. These four essential ingredients create a shield for your heart when you are feeling hurt and unjustly wronged. We can then with a clear conscience hand over our hurts and brokenness to God who brings healing and life. After all, Jesus came to heal the broken hearted!

*"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,  
Because He has anointed Me  
To preach the gospel to the poor;  
He has sent Me to **heal the broken hearted**,  
To proclaim liberty to the captives  
And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;  
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." - Luke 4:18-19 NKJV*

He wants us to be totally pure of heart (mind, will & emotions), - to not harbour anything but love towards God and our fellow man.

*"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." - Matthew 5:8 NKJV*

Example: Many years ago (and to be honest I can't remember the particulars of the incident as I dealt with the issue promptly and forgot them), someone from church wronged me in some way. Although I repeated often, "*I forgive them!*" negative thoughts kept plaguing me like a bunch of house flies that are determined to get into your eyes, nose and mouth. I'd forgive the person and lift the hurt to the Lord, only to have negative thoughts resurface again later, no matter how I tried to put them out of my mind. (To put this into perspective, this was not some deep seeded emotional hurt from my childhood that needed counselling, but a minor infraction on the part of another, that normally would not have been an issue apart from the interference from the enemy.) Subsequently, I was determined not to let these thoughts win, and continued to say, "*I forgive that person. It's over and done with, and now lies at the foot of the cross.*"

Then the following day before the church service began, I was sitting quietly before the Lord trying to once again rid my mind of these negative thoughts, when I literally heard a voice scream into my ear, "*Harden your heart!*" Besides the fact that I just about jumped through the roof upon hearing it, I knew straight away that that voice was the voice of a demon. Because the enemy had inadvertently shown his hand, I was able to tell it to go, and there was peace! That wasn't quite the end of the matter though. Later in the service, the guest speaker prophesied over me, and his words began, "*Because you have not hardened your heart...*" God had turned an otherwise dangerous situation into a rewarding one. Choosing to forgive no matter what, guards your heart.

When we were unsaved, God forgave us unconditionally, and now we in turn have that same ability to forgive others. What's more, Jesus teaches us that if we do not forgive, God the Father will not forgive us.

*"But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." - Matthew 6:15 NKJV*

Worse is Jesus' warning in the Parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21-35. Jesus finishes with this comment:

*"In his anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. **This is how My heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.**" - Matthew 18:34, 35 NIV*

This is a solemn warning from Jesus, indeed. Forgiveness is imperative if we are to have a pure heart, or the alternative is not good at all!

Emotional wounding is not the only way the enemy gets past our emotion gate. The enemy often employs emotional loaded fiery darts that can set you ablaze if you do not quench them quickly. These new emotions have the potential to ruin relationships, and to cause great rifts with a lifetime of pain and regret. The trick is to recognise them in an instant so that you can extinguish them. That sounds great but how do you do that in practice?

Paul tells us that we can quench the fiery darts with the shield of faith.

*"Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one." - Ephesians 6:16 NKJV*

There are many interpretations concerning the Christian armour as described by Paul. However, I tend to agree with those that interpret the armour to be a person's attitudes and standing in Christ. That is, we use the shield of *faith* by realising it is no longer I who lives but Christ who lives in me. That means I now have the mind of Christ, and all His thoughts are in agreement with His Word! I have the desires of Christ in my heart. Jesus doesn't ever have negative or wrongly placed emotions about anyone, for God is love and He is also just. Therefore, I don't have to accept those emotions, especially if the fruit from them will be bad. I can know for sure that those thoughts and emotions are not mine but are from hell, and as such refuse to allow them our attention. This may mean we tell them aloud to take a hike, or quote Scriptures that refute them, or by declaring love and forgiveness or even blessing over someone who hurt us, or by worshipping God, or simply by just praying in tongues.

The following example I also included in my first book, "*Save Your Marriage*": (You can find it in the Book Section of this website!)

Example: The manager of the business where I was working had just resigned, and the new guy had arrived to replace him. When I was first introduced, the thought popped into my head: "*He's a cutie!*" Now before I go further in this tale, please be aware that I don't weigh up the opposite sex in terms of cuteness. It's not my "thing" at all! Secondly, it was like someone had whispered in my ear and I was actually startled by the thought. It was obviously not my thought. At the time I thought that event was a very strange occurrence, but easily dismissing it, I went back to what I was working on and didn't give the incident another thought.

A few days passed. I was in my office this time when suddenly a thought of the new manager popped into my head, accompanied by a strong emotion of infatuation. Again this made no sense whatsoever! I barely even knew this guy! Not only that, but I was *very* happy in my marriage at that time. I wasn't looking for another relationship, nor did I even want one. I loved my husband *and* my God too much to even consider it, and besides, I simply wasn't interested in this guy. This also had to be from the enemy. Nevertheless, even though I was able to rationalise this, the feelings remained. So I started praying in tongues and giving glory to God out loud. (I had a private office so I wasn't bothering anyone else.) Well, you guessed it, those feelings and emotions evaporated immediately - they were not *mine* to begin with. Not only that, but now exposed as fraudulent, those feelings did not return.

Disappointments are another way in. These occur when a person's hopes and expectations (and attached to expectation is a certain amount of emotion whether they are well founded or not) are not met. The Bible reminds us:

*"Hope deferred makes the heart sick,  
But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life."* - Proverbs 13:12 NKJV

We can generally deal with the odd disappointment and move on, but when a person is constantly disappointed, the temptation is to doubt God, doubt His goodness and love, and this in turn can eventually lead to a complete loss of faith.

How did a string of disappointments become so powerful? They first captured the person's attention and then agreement, which empowered them. They entered the heart first through the emotions, which triggered other negative thoughts and emotions that justified them further. Because there was *agreement*, the enemy's lies were able to take root unhindered, and eventually the heart was poisoned. Finally, if there is sufficient wounding, an opportunistic spirit of grief can continue to do even more damage to the heart.

The important thing is to recognise that any negative emotion or inclination that is *not rooted in love*, is from hell. If we do not deal with these emotions immediately, these emotions have the opportunity to mess with our thoughts while we try to make sense with them or try to justify them, thereby causing great damage to our hearts - especially if over time we unwittingly water those seeds via continued negative thoughts and actions that eventually produce an unGodly harvest!

### ***The Motivational Gate***

The final gate that requires our protection is our motivation or will. What are the things that really motivate us? What makes us get out of bed in the morning and behave the way we do? Are there **beliefs** about ourselves, or the world, even those forged while we were still quite young, that cause us to seek after a certain path, goal or aspiration, and subsequently to behave in a certain way? Motivation can often lay buried beneath layers of habitualised behaviours and self-justifications.

For example: If we do not really yet know the love of the Father, we may be fixated on making ourselves feel good about ourselves - a kind of self medication with very nasty side effects.



This will be the motivation behind whatever we do, whether it looks to the world to be altruistic or not.

If we view wealth and/or status as a way to feel good about ourselves, then it will colour all we do. If we believe that what people think about us is important to our happiness, then we will constantly be trying to make ourselves big in other people's eyes. If helping others makes us feel good about ourselves, then that will be our motivation to act kindly towards others, not their needs or love for them. Even in the church, if we are only doing to be seen, or doing because it makes us feel like good Christians, we are still motivated by the possibility of a "feel good about ourselves" outcome, and not by the genuine love of God.

Most of us won't even stop to think why we do what we do. Our behaviour and reactions can be completely subconscious. For example: I love clothes and girly things and have had a very large wardrobe ever since I was able to buy my own things. On seeing it for the first time, a non-Christian friend once made the remark,

*"You're obviously making up for something!"*

Perhaps not the sweetest words ever spoken but they did hold an air of truth. I can't say I'd ever thought about it that way, but never ever having had the affirmation of my earthly father, I was unconsciously trying to make myself feel okay about myself. If I could at least look good, I would feel there was something likeable about me. I hadn't even thought about it before, but that motivation was not Godly and yet had lain hidden in my heart for years. Thankfully, now I know I am totally loved by God and although I still like to look my best, do not need this in order to feel worthy or okay as a human being.

Some deep-seated motivations can originate from childhood trauma, and may require Christian counselling where the loving hand of the Father can heal and change. However, there are those beliefs and subsequent motivations that colour our decisions everyday. If we were to stop and ask why, those motivations would become very apparent. What are our underlying beliefs about ourselves and the world, and about God's character and love towards us? Ask yourself, why do we put our hands up for ministry? Is it because we love the church and people and truly wish to show that love by serving, or because we are hoping to be noticed and promoted, or perhaps even to convince ourselves that we are good Christians? Why do we run to see the next greatest prophetic speaker to visit town? Is it because of our love for the prophetic voice of God, or are we hoping to receive another prophetic word to make ourselves feel good about ourselves?

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13 that without *love* as our motivator, we are nothing and what we do amounts to nothing.

*"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing." - 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 NKJV*

Wow! That means that knowing our motivation is not just important but imperative! Consider the words of Jesus,

*"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"* - Matthew 7:21-23 NKJV

If we are not motivated by our love for God first and foremost and as a result, love for others, not only will the works we do be counted as nothing, but we will also be unrecognisable as belonging to Him. Are not Jesus's disciples recognised by their love? (John 13:35)

This motivation gate, is much harder to guard, and if we are not vigilant, can allow the enemy to subversively taint our heart. Paul tells the Corinthians to examine themselves.

*"Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you fail to meet the test!"* - 2 Corinthians 13:5 ? ESV

Paul was talking about doing what was right before God (vs. 7) but if our motivation is not love, what we've done is not a matter of right or wrong but it is absolutely of no value at all (1 Cor 13)! Further, if God has not sanctioned our actions, they are worthless before God and could even be detrimental long term. In fact, any works we lay on the foundation of our salvation that are not ordained by God, will be burned up as stubble.

*"According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."* - 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 - NKJV

If you find it hard to ask yourself, "What is motivating me to want to do that?" or "What is my underlying belief(s) that compel(s) me to do this?", having someone you trust ask the question (e.g. Christian mentor or close Christian friend), can also shine a light on your heart. Ultimately though, your relationship with God, coupled with a daily examination while you sit quietly before Him, is the best place to find the reality of your heart. The Holy Spirit knows all and will thankfully not allow us to "get away with" anything. He is the author and finisher of our faith, and knows exactly how to teach us the way that best suits us!

My old pastor from Ballarat use to say that when we are first saved, we are clean, feeling loved and happy, but although we've been washed in the blood, our character (which is seated in our heart) still needs a great deal of work. We may not even realise it. It's almost as if God has His hand over it in case we'd be overwhelmed with all the traits and flaws that need adjusting or eradicating. However, at the right time He moves His hand a little and points to an issue with our character. Unlike the enemy who whispers thoughts enflamed with emotion, when

the Holy Spirit reveals to us character flaws embedded in our heart (something which taints our motivations), there is no strong emotion or judgement or condemnation attached. We simply see this revelation for what it is and can answer calmly, "*Oh yeah! I am like that, aren't I?*" or "*Yes, that really was my motivation. I see that now!*" Thus, the process of change can begin.

## ***Temptations***

I have briefly given you an overview of the gates to the heart, but the enemy of our souls can sneak through those gates via temptations, and they can be so disguised that we don't realise what we allow to pass. A bit like a robber hiding under a blanket as the cart is wheeled through the gate to the city.

For example: God or one of His prophets may give the message that God is about to move us into a new ministry or season or location, or even that He is about to bless us enormously. This thought is very appealing - even exciting! Wow! That's great! We feel good about it! It has peeked our emotions. How will this happen? We might begin to plan and spend hours thinking about the details, and searching for the right books, tools, house/location or whatever. We may imagine what the blessing is like or if financial, how we would spend it. After all, we just want to be prepared, right? However, we can be tempted to give that new thing too much attention, thus, making it an idol which consumes our thoughts and the desires of our heart. Even our prayers can be distracted by this, or centred around this rather than asking the Holy Spirit how to pray.

This temptation entered through the emotion gate and we didn't see it. It then began manipulating our thoughts and motivations. **Anything** that takes our eyes off God has the potential to poison our heart against Him. You could call this temptation "**the lust of our eyes!**"

Another example: Being physically exhausted, and too tired to do much else, or even being ill and unable to do much at all, we may be tempted to simply put our feet up and watch our favourite show. Now the show may be very wholesome and even Christian - and there are now plenty of good Christian TV series and movies available - but is this beneficial? How is it affecting our thought processes? Is this a positive thing? Is God happy for us to use our time in this manner or are there more pressing things He has for us to do (perhaps calling, encouraging or even witnessing to someone), even if those things are simply to sit with Him in prayer or worship, or study the Word? In truth, we still belong to Him, no matter how we feel. (i.e. Being tired is not a "do-whatever-you-feel-like-doing" pass!) Jesus was physically hungry at the end of His 40 day fast in the desert, but chose not to change the stones into bread when tempted. He did not give into the flesh at all! This temptation to indulge the flesh instead of asking God what He wants us to do, even if we are exhausted, can be considered "**the lust of our flesh**". (I'm sure you can think of far worse examples in this category.)

Yet another example: If we receive a major blessing or opportunity, and are not guarding our hearts, we may be tempted to believe we deserved this because we are more holy, more giving or just better than others. Such a seemingly positive event can have very negative consequences for our hearts!

A variation on this theme is in making a choice for something "life-changing" (be it a job, ministry, business deal or whatever that we think may be "the one chance in a lifetime" that

we feel will benefit us), when in actual fact, God is trying to steer us away from this because it will not ultimately be beneficial to us. We can even justify our choice by calling it God's blessing. After all, He is good to His children, right? However, to state the obvious, God's idea of what is good for us can differ greatly to our own. Nevertheless, our desires can over-ride His warnings when we keep focussed on satisfying them, instead of focussed on God.

These kinds of temptations are known as "**the pride of life**". We might be inclined to tell ourselves that pride is easily avoidable, and hey, we've gotten that beat. We don't walk around puffed up or talk about ourselves and how wonderful we are, but no, pride can sometimes be subtle and come disguised in any number of positive events, promotions, gifts and surprises.

Remember that Jesus was likewise tempted in the desert. Each temptation was a picture of the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. In a similar manner, we too will be tempted in these areas. Some temptations are obvious, others we may not recognise until the Holy Spirit stops us abruptly and points to the state of our heart. This is why vigilance is required, and why Paul suggests that we guard with all diligence!