



Guard Your Heart

Like you, I am inundated daily with an enormous flow of information, most of it depressing. When I awake in the morning, I have the ability to look on my phone and get a newsfeed that would overwhelm the average person. At my fingertips I can delve into reports of the first responders in Israel who had to try and collect the remains of decapitated babies. This is followed by civilian casualty reports from the bombing in Gaza . . . Deaths from fentanyl are setting all time highs. . . The Russians are reporting high Ukrainian casualties on the front lines in Donetsk while the Ukrainians are reporting desperate Russian losses in the South of the country. . . A manhunt is on for the suspect in yet another mass shooting, this time in Maine, while politicians are lining up to shout at one another about the second amendment vs. gun control. . . Economists are forecasting tough times ahead and inflation is shrinking the American paycheck . . . Labor strikes have stalled manufacturing and auto plants are at a standstill amid gridlocked negotiations . . . Domestic suicide numbers are at catastrophic levels. The flow of bad news seems unrelenting. From the halls of congress to local school board meetings, belligerent disagreements threaten to boil over. We live in a contentious age, and you and I bear the burden of this unending chaos. *Friend, let me encourage you to guard your heart as you navigate the ebb and flow of chaos that we find ourselves in.*

In the fourth chapter of Proverbs, Solomon records a set of principles that he identifies as fatherly advice to his sons. He encourages them to gain wisdom and understanding, and to pursue a righteous path in life. His admonition in verse twenty-three rings true and necessary for the day we are living in. *Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.* Some translations say the heart is the 'wellspring of life.' Whatever your preferred translation, the truth remains the same. Your heart is the 'home base' from which all action emanates. Are you feeling hopeful or depressed? Excited or discouraged? Angry or generous? Your heart sets the direction for your choices in a fundamental way, and every day your heart is under assault.

You see, the human heart was not made for this broken world. We are living in a smoldering battlefield. The body counts are piling up. Your heart was intended for something totally different. You were made in the image of the Creator, designed for Eden. We were not intended to have to navigate betrayal, murder, or rape. Your heart was not made for this vicious place. In Eden, death was not part of the design. If you question the assertion, just look at how we operate in a broken world.

Behavioral research has outlined universal stages to grief and loss that people experience the world over. It does not matter which continent you were born on; the death of a loved one sends us down a path of mourning that follows a predictable set of steps. Whether you ascribe to a five or a seven stage model of grief, all the

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We are currently scheduling speaking engagements. If you are interested in inviting one of our chaplains to come and share with your church, class, or community group, let us know!

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The Parable

By Logan Stark

Psalm 19:1

The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

It is officially fall! The smell of pumpkin spice is in the air, leaves are drifting from the trees, and falling walnuts have been trying to kill me. I'm serious. They've been smashing against my house, have become tripping hazards in my yard, and have been attracting rabid rodents to my property.

Fall, like any season, has its fans and detractors. Except for the killer walnuts and the ragweed, I am a fan of this season. I love the cooler temperatures, the many colors of the trees, and the pumpkin spice. Most of all, I love how fall can be a parable for our lives.

There's so much we can learn from nature, especially if we view it as the handiwork of our Creator. Fall is a transitional season from summer to winter. It's a time of change, as trees alter their leaves from green to red, yellow, orange, and brown. Yes, each season has its changes, but I believe fall is perhaps the most notable for it, because of how drastic it is. The trees display their beautifully transformed leaves before they finally shed and then begin their hibernation till the end of winter.

Fall is a time of change, and a reminder for us that we can change. Not everything is set in stone. It's never too late to begin eating healthier, exercising more, or watching less TV. It's a great reminder that we can work on ourselves to change for the better. Nevertheless, it should be a more pronounced reminder, that it's never too late to invest in our spiritual lives. Yes, our physical temples are important, but aren't our souls even more so?

Fall can be a great reminder that we too can make changes to help us become more like Christ. Maybe it can be a motivation to help us pray more, or to work on other spiritual disciplines. Maybe it can remind us that we need to adopt the habit of reading our Bibles daily. Maybe it can give us confidence to confess our addiction to a trusted friend and to get support to overcome it. Or maybe, if you haven't already done so, fall can help you realize that there is a Creator, and you would like to get to know Him.

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research agrees that the first response of the human heart to tragedy is denial. The common reaction to the death of a loved one is a resounding “NO!!! It cannot be. I don’t believe it.” Our core response in a vulnerable moment reveals our design. We are totally unequipped to manage such devastating news.

This simple truth was vividly illustrated for me about a week ago during our girl’s chapel service. Everything was going fine until our lesson. Pastor Logan got up front and began to share on what scripture says about death and heaven. As soon as the topic of death came up, all of the girls in the room engaged in a synchronized meltdown. The girl sitting in the pew in front of me, crawled under her pew, pulled out a ruler, and started threatening to act out. All the rest of the girls in the room started, crying, yelling, jumping out of their seats. It was astounding to watch a peaceful room erupt into chaos. In such short order the staff had to call for assistance, and it took us a while to get the girls dialed down. When I ask them to share why they were so upset, each one began unpacking details of recent loss.

“My dad died in August. . . My grandma died in September.” As we discussed the mounting losses, the girls all agreed that they felt totally unable to deal with the news.

Like these girls, our hearts were not made for this place, and the proof extends beyond issues of grief and loss. Like our Creator, whose image we bear, we are woven together with an innate sense of personal justice. The most hardened criminal in the ugliest prison still carries a belief in basic fairness. Just steal his food or betray his trust and you will see this innate need for justice rise in his heart. Why would a mistreated person even be bothered by his abuse if he did not have a deep rooted need for righteousness? It cannot be denied, our inherent design belies a need for something better.

Moreover, our minds were not made to be omniscient. You and I are not designed to carry the weight of all of the details of war, starvation, murder, and violence the world over. As much as you may wish to consume all of this bad news, the burden of is simply too much to bear. You are not able to carry it.

First of all, you don’t really have access to the whole truth. You cannot possibly understand in detail every aspect of who did what, and why. You cannot see the history leading up to these events. You have no knowledge whatsoever to the true motivations driving the actions. You and I know a lot less than we think we do.

Second, even if somehow you could miraculously comprehend every angle and perspective on something as complex as the current war in Europe, what would you do about it? You are completely unequipped to comprehend, much less act on an omniscient view of the world. Only God is able to know completely. Only He is capable of carrying the burden of seeing the whole truth, and only He is wise enough to know what to do with that knowledge.

Friends, our minds were not made to know everything. Our hearts are not designed to carry the weight of tragedy. Yet so many of us are subjecting ourselves to full exposure. Like drinking out of a fire hydrant, we try to consume and understand every rumor and report. Like staring into the sun, we watch the videos, we listen to the podcasts, read the articles. We get drawn into pointless

⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.’ because the kingdom of God is in you.” -Colossians 2

Note from the treasurer

In this season of Thanksgiving, I want to express how thankful we are for the churches and individuals who have made this ministry possible over the last 20 years. Your support enables us to reach out to so many children in the facilities we partner with, bringing Bibles and spiritual guidance where they are. We have currently raised about 70% of our budget for 2023. As the year draws to a close, would you consider joining us in this important work by giving to help close the gap?

You can give online at:

www.daysofhope.net/give

or by mail to:

Days of Hope Ministries

PO Box 12

St. James, MO 65559

Thank You!!

DAYS OF
HOPE

Passionately communicating the love of God to hurting kids in a gentle way.

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skirmishes with contentious squabblers on Facebook. We obsess over politics and waste our days marinating in this junk. We ride the waves of frustration, despondence, and hopelessness that this sewage evokes. Friend, please hear me. You need to guard your heart.

I am not suggesting that you go live in a bunker. I am not asking you to stick your head in the sand and ignore the world around you. You and I are called to minister grace to a hurting world around us. We do need to be engaged and willing to connect with others. But we need to be wise enough to understand the toll that this broken place takes on us, and act accordingly.

But what do we do when the bad news knocks on our front door? It is one thing to get worked up about injustice in the Middle East. It is another thing altogether when tragedy strikes in my own family. You need to understand that catastrophe invites us to question God's goodness. Suffering drives us to doubt His love for us. Accusation is the natural response of the human heart in tragedy.

When Martha encountered Jesus at her brother's funeral in John 11, her comment was painfully simple.

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Moments later, her sister Mary made the same statement, word for word.

The grieving human heart is tempted into a stance of anger and accusation against God. *Why would He allow this to occur?* But friends, look closer. See Jesus, who is deeply moved, groaning in spirit, and weeping at the grave of his dear friend. My ability to clearly see the broken heart of my Savior makes all the difference in how I navigate the great crushing moments of my life.

Jesus told us that 'in this world you will have trouble.' Like it or not, there will be struggle and pain, enough to go around for all of us in measure. Why invite more into your daily life? Become a wise gatekeeper of your own heart, and keep yourself, as Paul wrote, 'rooted and built up' in Jesus. And if you find yourself in a season of grief and suffering, press into the heart of Jesus. See how He grieves with you in moments of breaking.

And above all else, guard your heart.

Christmas Day Stocking Distribution

It is hard to believe, but 2023 is winding down and we are quickly approaching the Christmas season. We expect to have a large number of youth at the St. James campus who are unable to go on a pass over the holidays. As we have in the past, we are gearing up to provide a Christmas stocking for each child on campus on December 25th.

These stockings include small, safe toys and hygiene items that you might expect to find in a Christmas stockings. We put in a small stuffed animal, and we include a little chocolate! We also take the time to find an item like a daily Bible journal or an age-appropriate Christian book that will encourage the child in their walk with God.

We do all that we can to minimize the expense of this project. I always purchase the actual stockings when they go on sale the first week of January. We have a volunteer 'secret shopper' who is on the lookout for clearance items throughout the year. We purchase journals and book titles from the clearance rack when we can. But we still have a significant expense in filling these stockings with items for the children and teens who receive them.

Would you consider sponsoring one or more stockings for a child this Christmas? Our expenses vary, but I would estimate that the gift we give a child on Christmas Day costs around \$30 all together. As you are preparing for this coming holiday season, join us in giving a gift of love and encouragement to a child this Christmas. Thank You!!

