

THE WAY OF THE WISE: GUARD YOUR HEART

“The Way of the Wise” flows through the heart. The book of Proverbs constantly points to the heart as the wellspring of life. Jesus himself spoke of this reality regularly in his teaching.

Proverbs 3:5-6

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own
understanding.*

*In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.*

Proverbs 4:23

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

Everything in your life flows from your heart, which is why it is important to “guard your heart with all vigilance.” Vigilance speaks to our alertness, focus, awareness, attentiveness to what is happening in our hearts. Even if you agree this is important, you may be asking questions like: What are some ways that I can pay attention to what is happening in my heart? How do I know if I am effectively keeping watch on my heart? Am I staying on or straying from the path of the wise?

This worksheet provides questions for personal reflection on your heart’s health. This is not an exhaustive exploration of all it means to guard your heart, but it’s a helpful tool for self-awareness and spiritual reflection as you consider your walk with the Lord.

SPIRITUAL HEALTH

- Spiritual Drift – When you wander spiritually, how long does it take you to return to the Lord?
- Fellowship of the Spirit – The New Testament speaks of our grieving the Spirit of God, needing to yield to the conviction of God’s Spirit, and being led by the Spirit. Is your heart in fellowship with the Holy Spirit?
- Dealing with Sin – Are you aware of sin in your life? Are you callous to sin? Are you sorrowful about it? Do you walk in shame of your sin or wrestle with it by God’s grace?
- Confession – Do you confess sins that trip you up and entangle you? Do you have one or two people you can routinely reach out to for confession and accountability and encouragement?
- Wholeness and Holiness – Can you see these increasing in your life over time? Can others see growth in obedience? Are you experiencing growing joy with Christ?
- Hopefulness – Is your life marked by cynicism or sarcasm? Are you able to find reservoirs of hope in the goodness of our world, the promises of the Bible, and friendship with God?

PERSONAL HEALTH

- Openness to Correction – How open are you to the honest feedback of others?
- Lack of Defensiveness – Are you defensive when someone points out a mistake you’ve made?
- Ability to Admit Faults – Are you more likely to blame shift and focus on someone else’s mistakes or own your own errors?
- Drivenness to Seek Success – How strongly do you feel you must win or succeed? Are you crushed by failure, lack of success, or lack of recognition? Do you feel it is not enough to experience success but you also need to defeat others?
- Physical Fitness – Are you physically healthy and active? Is your diet healthy and nourishing?

- Compulsiveness – Are there areas of compulsive behavior in your life? Do you set appropriate limits on unhealthy or unhelpful behaviors?
- Resilience – Do you bounce back after being stretched and stressed by the hardships of life? How effectively can you trust God when life's trials seem formidable?

EMOTIONAL HEALTH

- Self-control – Do you have freedom from the control of your emotions? Can you redirect after a setback or hurt or frustration? Can you “come down” after an emotional high or do you immediately feel the need to chase another high?
- Self-awareness – Can you read the emotions of others in the room and respond appropriately? Are you aware of how your emotions impact those around you?
- Reactions – Do you refuse to create emotional earthquakes for those around you?
- Bitterness – Do you become fixated on hurts & wrongs you've suffered? Can you let things go, or does your mind get stuck in a repeat mode, replaying things someone did or said?
- Connection – Would those close to you say that you really listen to wise counsel from others? Or do you have a tendency to pull away and isolate yourself from others?
- Community – Do you seek friends to help bear your burdens? Do you share “what is really going on” in your heart with others? Do you try to press through struggles on your own?

RELATIONAL HEALTH

- Relational Connectivity – Do others want to be with you because you are a life-giving presence?
- Flexibility – Are you willing to let things go, overlook minor offenses, and yield to the preferences of others in non-moral matters?
- Forgiveness – Do you demonstrate the ability to forgive others? Do you keep short accounts? Do you hold a grudge or punish others (directly or indirectly)?
- Expectations – Do you have reasonable expectations of others?
- Fault-finding – Do people feel you constantly point out the faults of others?
- Comparison – Do you feel better about yourself by tearing others down? Do you feel bad about yourself because you don't feel you measure up to others in some way?
- Negativity – Are you a complainer or grumbler? Do you find the bad in every situation?
- Joyfulness – Is your life marked by laughter and enjoyment of all the good you can find?

Let's acknowledge the obvious: this can feel overwhelming. You will not manage everything as you like. You will never have it all together this side of heaven. That's why Eugene Peterson wrote about a *long obedience in the same direction*. Today, our job is not to arrive at perfection but to take steps in the right direction. Be assured there is grace for all your sin and shortcomings. Jesus invited all who are weary & weighed down to turn to him. He will get you through by grace. You can count on him. Reminders of God's forgiveness: Psalm 103:12, Isaiah 1:18, Ephesians 1:7, Ephesians 2:8-10, 1 John 1:8, 1 John 4:10.

“I couldn't look at the sun directly, but I could look at where the light fell.” - St. Augustine

So, what should you do today with what you've learned? Take a step in the way of wisdom. And then take another and another and another. Our lives are formed or shaped by the routines and regular activities we instill into every day. You may not be able to see all of the answers you seek, you may not know all you'd like to know about God, and you may not be as much like Jesus as you want just yet. But you can trust his love and keep walking where the light falls to show you the path ahead.