

**“The only way to get what you really want, is to know what you really want. And the only way to know what you really want, is to know yourself. And the only way to know yourself, is to be yourself. And the only way to be yourself is to listen to your heart.”**

Mike Dooley (Author and Inspirational Speaker)

**“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life”**

Proverbs 4:23 (New International Version)

## INTRODUCTION

It appears today in American society that mass media and pop culture are enamored with the notion of following your heart. From romantic situations to complex moral dilemmas, the leaning of a person’s heart seems to be the sole test of truth and voice of reason. Accordingly, the heart alone holds the keys to navigating life and love.

The Disney company is no stranger to this philosophy of the heart. Even animated features aimed at young audiences espouse this notion of the heart. Reaching back several decades, the lovely Cinderella says, “A dream is a wish your heart makes when you're fast asleep.”<sup>1</sup> Aladdin preaches, “Like so many things, it is not what outside, but what is inside that counts.”<sup>2</sup> Pinocchio quips, “Always let your conscience be your guide”<sup>3</sup>. From the original (but unreleased) soundtrack of Disney’s Cinderella II, you can hear these lyrics to the song “Follow Your Heart” sung by Brooke Allison on a collection of like-minded Disney animated movie songs<sup>4</sup>:

“so make your own way show the beauty within  
when you follow your heart theres no heart you can't win

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<sup>1</sup> *Cinderella*. Dir. Clyde Geronimi, Hamilton Luske, Wilfred Jackson. Prod. Walt Disney. 1950. DVD. Diamond Edition 3-disc Blu-ray/DVD/Digital Copy Combo, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> *Aladdin*. Directed, Produced and Written by Ron Clements, John Musker. Narr. Robin Williams. Prod. Walt Disney Feature Animation. 1992. DVD. Two-disc Platinum Edition, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> *Pinocchio*. Dir. Ben Sharpsteen, Hamilton Luske. Prod. Walt Disney. 1940. DVD. Two-Disc 70th Anniversary Platinum Edition, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> *Disney’s Princess Favorites*. Various Artists. Compilation Album CD, 2002. The song “Follow Your Heart” performed by Brooke Allison. Los Angeles: Walk Disney Records

so reach for the sky its not as high as it seems  
just follow your heart go as far as your dreams  
there's a world full of changing and you've just begun  
don't let them tell you it's simply not done  
when you follow your heart you'll shine bright as the sun”

Pop music has continued to tell the story of the heart’s moral and life-guiding power. From Kenny Loggins’ hit “Your Heart Will Lead You Home”<sup>5</sup> (*The Tigger Movie*<sup>6</sup>) to Phil Collin’s hit “You’ll Be in My Heart”<sup>7</sup> (*Tarzan*<sup>8</sup>), the heart is portrayed as that beacon and source of truth that never fails.

Even key innovators like the late Steve Jobs espouse this same rhetoric of the heart making it seem the infallible compass for success in life. From his commencement speech given in 2005 to Stanford students, Jobs said, “And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.”<sup>9</sup>

Regardless of how pervasive this view of the heart may be in media and pop culture, the Bible tells a different story about the heart and how it guides a person’s life. As Gerald Bilkes writes in an article about reading Scripture, “...The Bible speaks to and claims our hearts...God is addressing our whole being.”<sup>10</sup> The Bible contains some 900 references to the heart from cover

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<sup>5</sup> Loggins, Kenny; Sherman, Richard and Robert. *Your Heart Will Lead You Home* from *The Tigger Movie - Songs & Story* CD. Walt Disney Records, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> *The Tigger Movie*. Dir. Jun Falkenstein. Prod. Cheryl Abood, Jennifer Blohm, Richmond Horine. Characters created by A.A. Milne. Buena Vista Pictures, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Collins, Phil. From *Tarzan: An Original Walt Disney Records Soundtrack* CD. Walt Disney Records, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> *Tarzan*. Dir. Chris Buck, Kevin Lima. Prod. Bonnie Arnold. Based on *Tarzan of the Apes* by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Walt Disney Pictures, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Commencement address delivered to Stanford University graduates by Steve Jobs, former CEO of Apple Computer and of Pixar Animation Studios, on June 12, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Bilkes, Gerald M. Article ‘Heart-Reading: Recovering A Spiritual Approach to the Bible, p18 in *Puritan Reformed Journal*. Volume PRJ 1:2 (July 2009)

to cover<sup>11</sup> and only once does the reference deal with a more literal use (see Exodus 28:29-30). As Keathley comments, “the heart is a prominent concept and one of the most commonly used words of the Bible”<sup>12</sup>. Keathley continues that the term “generally speaks of the inner person and the spiritual life in all its various aspects” and, “Like the human heart (physical organ), it is central and vital to our existence.” Further, *The Revell Bible Dictionary* describes the Bible’s view of the human heart as “The true inner self...the very essence of our being.”<sup>13</sup> Mark Driscoll, in a message preached at Mars Hill Church in Seattle, WA, once more regarding God’s view of the heart, stated simply that the heart “is our moral center.”<sup>14</sup> Elmer Towns writes this about the Biblical portrait of the heart:<sup>15</sup>

“Thus, the heart, which is the seat of man’s conscious life in its moral, volitional, intellectual and emotional aspects is vitally related to and is the center of the nonmaterial man. The soul-spirit, moral consciousness, mind and flesh of man are vitally related to the heart and function through the heart.”

Considering that over 35% of the references to the heart are concentrated in the book of Psalms and Proverbs<sup>16</sup>, this paper will focus on the wisdom about the heart specifically from the Sages in Proverbs. According to Zuck (110), “Man’s heart (inner being) is referred to 70 times in

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<sup>11</sup> “heart”. p 242. *NIV Compact Dictionary of the Bible*. 1989. Grand Rapids: Zondervan

<sup>12</sup> Keathley III, J. Hampton. *Guarding the Heart*. Article from bible.org Pub. March 29, 2007. Accessed July 31st, 2013 from <https://bible.org/article/guarding-heart>

<sup>13</sup> “heart” 473-474 entry from *The Revell Bible Dictionary*, 1990. Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company

<sup>14</sup> Driscoll, Mark. “*The Heart*.” Proverbs Sermon Series. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, Washington. 7 October, 2001. Sermon.

<sup>15</sup> Towns, Elmer. ‘The Meaning of Heart in the New Testament’. *Grace Journal*. Volume GJ 12:1 (Winter 1971). p 44

<sup>16</sup> “heart” searches from [biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas/leb.html](http://biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas/leb.html), referenced July 30th, 2013 show 545 references of Hebrew word לֵב for heart Leb (labe) with 99 in Psalms and 94 in Proverbs (NAS Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon)

Proverbs...”<sup>17</sup> Voorwinde’s thematic collection on the heart from Proverbs contains well over 50 entries alone (55-61)<sup>18</sup>! This will be ample material for a healthier understanding of the power and sway of the human heart.

### **THE SAGES SAY...**

An appropriate place to begin to understand the real truth about the heart is found early in the book of Proverbs. As quoted at the beginning of this paper, in Proverbs 4:23 (NIV), we’re asked to put guarding our hearts first in our list of priorities because from it comes the wellspring of life (or as the King James Version, KJV renders it, ‘out of it are the issues of life’). By the context of Proverbs 4, we’re taught as if we’re sitting at the feet of a parent. In that posture, our Sage/father warns us to keep the teachings close within our hearts (4:21) because from them flow a healthy life (4:22). As far as the words and phrasing used, the English translations vary slightly. The 4 Hebrew words of note in 4:23 are words the New American Standard Bible (NASB) translates as “watch” (נָצַר - naw’star; to guard over like a city), “diligence” (מִשְׁמָר - mish’mar; round the clock surveillance) and “springs” (תּוֹצֵאֵהוּ - totsaw-aw; outgoing, a going out, source) and “life” (חַיִּי - khaw-yah-ee; to live or have life). A few of the major versions start the verse with “Keep” as the first word and some continue “your heart with all diligence” (or “vigilance” as with New Revised Standard Version or NRSV and the English Standard Version, or ESV) while at least one of the other major versions, the NASB, starts with “Watch.” Even though there are slight variations in the English renderings, basically we find a father/sage warning his son/pupil to keep hold of instruction and wisdom and stay clear of the

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<sup>17</sup> Zuck, Roy B. Edit.1995. *Learning from the Sages*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

<sup>18</sup> Voorwinde, Stephen. 1981. *Wisdom for Today’s Issues*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.

paths of the wicked, violent, lustful. Linked to the previous v.22 in that by keeping, one is given a path to life and health to the whole body.

So, this passage instructs us that the human heart is in serious need of guarding and that must be a chief priority for the people of God. It also paints a picture of a spring from which a healthy life flows.

However, before we can determine why it needs this much diligent protection, we must gather a more fuller picture of the theme throughout the Proverbs collection. So we'll take a look at the good, the bad and the reality.

## **THE GOOD**

Proverbs tells us that the human heart has great potential and importance. It is described as a storehouse of knowledge, wisdom, understanding and teaching. It is pictured as a treasury of loyalty and faithfulness and of words of knowledge (2:2,10; 3:1,3). We're also told that God can see into the human heart and knows its condition and contents (15:11; 17:3; 21:1-2; 24:12). Not only is God very keen to it, it's condition drives a person's overall emotional health (15:13,15,30; 17:22; 24:17; 25:20; 27:9,11; 29:17). In fact, a person who's heart is wise can successfully tell the difference between good and evil, right and wrong (16:21). According to Baker's Evangelical Dictionary, "the heart functions as the conscience."<sup>19</sup>

When a heart is healthy, it can trust other people and remain open to peaceful relationships (31:11). As the storyline in *The Anatomy of Peace* points out, "the secret to war is to have a heart of peace"<sup>20</sup>, and further, that there are "two ways of being: one with the heart at

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<sup>19</sup> "heart" Waltke, Bruce K. *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary*. Accessed July 29, 2013 <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/heart.html>

<sup>20</sup> *The Anatomy of Peace*. Arbinger Institute. 2006,2008. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. p 27.

war, where we see others as objects, and the other with the heart of peace, where we see others as people.”<sup>21</sup>

## **THE BAD**

Unfortunately, Proverbs also points out the tendency of the heart to adopt negative traits. The Sages teach that the heart can hate, despise discipline and reproof and, when perverted, creates evil. Furthermore, the heart can and will (if left unchecked) make wicked plans. The heart is described as wily, harboring evil desire, and prone to rage - and that the Lord hates (5:12; 6:14,18; 25; 7:10; 19:3; 26:23-25). Proverbs goes on to warn that the heart can dwell on anxiety, harbor deceit and weigh a person down. It can be made sick when what is hoped for is delayed (12:20; 12:25; 13:10; 23:7). The heart can know its own bitterness and sadness (14:10,13). We’re also told that people who are fools have no wisdom in their hearts (14:33). We are warned that a heart that is proud or stubborn is sinful (18:12; 21:4; 28:14) and that the young have folly in their heart needing to be dealt with (22:15). Finally, the heart is often prone to envy sinners and those who pursue evil (23:17).

## **(AND) THE REALITY**

So, in Proverbs, not unlike the rest of Scripture, we’re presented a 2-sided view of the human heart. On the one hand, a healthy heart leads to one’s ability to successfully navigate life and have joy and peace, whereas an unhealthy heart brings evil, trouble, sickness and judgement.

As Towns states:<sup>22</sup>

“According to the Bible the heart is the centre: The centre of physical life, the centre of mercy, the centre of damnation and salvation, the centre of God’s working and the centre of the devil’s working, the centre from which everything works in which moulds the human mechanism”

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p 124-125.

<sup>22</sup> Towns, p 37 quoting from Oswald Chamber’s work *Biblical Theology*, p. 100.

The question is then what is the health of your heart? If it is healthy, then relying on it can be more trustworthy, but if not, the heart can be the wrong test of truth in making life choices. Even secular sources understand the danger of heart only decision making. In Christine Meinecke's book *Everybody Marries the Wrong Person*, she says, "...following your heart in decision-making does disservice." She concludes, "Instead of following your heart, use your head and trust your gut."<sup>23</sup>

With all these descriptions of a heart gone bad, there is grave danger that has eternal consequences. In short, the heart is not a safe place to rest in and thus, needs its boundaries need proper, intentional guarding to keep negative influences at bay (Proverbs 28:26). If one continues to harden their heart through leaving it unchecked, unguarded and left on its own, it can move beyond critical. As Waltke observes in commenting on Proverbs 28:14, "When one hardens his heart, his psyche can no longer feel, response, and opt for a new direction. The hardened heart is fixed in unbelief and unbending defiance to God...(and) cannot be moved to a new sphere of behavior."<sup>24</sup> One of the most pointed examples of a person's hardening heart is in the account of the Pharaoh and Moses (Exodus 1-11; see also Romans 9).

Even though the media and popular culture may try to persuade us that the heart is *the* pure beacon of truth for life choices, it is clear that the heart, as the seat of all our being, needs cared for, protected and nurtured with God's Word to remain trustworthy. Regardless of what Roxette may sing about relationships in their #1 hit from 1988 "Listen to Your Heart"<sup>25</sup>, or

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted by *Psychology Today* in an article published June 28th, 2010. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/everybody-marries-the-wrong-person/201006/bad-advice-follow-your-heart>.

<sup>24</sup> Waltke, Bruce K. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15-31*. 2005. p 419.

<sup>25</sup> Gessle, Per; Persson, Mats. *Listen To Your Heart* single from the album *Look Sharp!* EMI. CD. Recorded 1988.

Napoleon says to his friend Pedro in 2004's *Napoleon Dynamite*<sup>26</sup>, "Just follow your heart.

That's what I do", students of the wisdom teachings in the Bible know much better. As the Life Application Bible states:<sup>27</sup>

"Our heart—our feelings of love and desire—dictates to a great extent how we live because we always find time to do what we enjoy. Solomon tells us to guard our hearts above all else, making sure we concentrate on those desires that will keep us on the right path. Make sure your affections lead you in the right direction. Put boundaries on your desires: Don't go after everything you see. Look straight ahead, keep your eyes fixed on your goal, and don't get sidetracked on detours that lead to sin."

The person interested in honoring and serving God, according to the Sages in Proverbs, must make guarding the heart a priority. For from the heart comes, as the Contemporary English Version, CEV, renders, "...the course of your life." As Keathley concludes, "How well am I guarding my heart? Is the condition of my heart my greatest concern? It should be because it is so determinative of every aspect of life. It ultimately determines my love for God and for others. It determines who I am and what I do."<sup>28</sup>

Our hearts, the inner centre of who we are, need careful, regular examination and fresh conviction of areas of concern (Proverbs 5:12; 28:13). One needs to ask regularly, does my behavior give a glimpse into the condition of my heart (Proverbs 27:19)? In addition, our hearts need cheering, encouragement and comfort (Proverbs 15:13,15). According to Waltke, even our outward appearance flows from the condition of our heart.<sup>29</sup> It may in fact be Biblical to say

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<sup>26</sup> *Napoleon Dynamite*. Dir. Jared Hess. Perfs. Jon Heder, Efen Ramirez. Fox Searchlight Pictures, Paramount Pictures, 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Proverbs 4:23 notes from the *Life Application Study Bible*. 2004. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

<sup>28</sup> Keathley, conclusion.

<sup>29</sup> Waltke, Bruce K. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (NICOT). The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15*. 2004. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. p 90-91 "The heart in biblical anthropology controls the body, its facial expressions, its tongue, and all its other members..." See also Waltke, Bruce K. *NICOT. The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15-31*. 2005. p 624 on Proverbs 15:13 "the parallels of v.13 assume that the heart affects both a person's outward appearance and his inward spirit..."



that at times, we literally wear our heart on our sleeves! The heart determines our behavior, our values, beliefs, aspirations and pursuits. If we fail to be diligent in guarding our heart, we are subject to those areas led astray by the world's version.<sup>30</sup> Because of this, Waltke concludes, "Since the heart is the center of a person's emotional-intellectual-religious-moral-activity, it must be safeguarded above all things."<sup>31</sup> The heart's condition is connected to corrupt speech like many other cause and effect relationships. In commenting on Proverbs 17:20,22, Waltke talks about those connections between the heart and the spirit<sup>32</sup> as psychosomatic<sup>33</sup> effects.

## CONCLUSION

In closing, guarding our heart (and our wellspring), requires extreme diligence on what our hearts are allowed to hear, see, and dwell on. Popular media and culture sends message after message, loudly and persistently. In contrast, God's voice (1 Kings 19:11-14) must be sought out through prayer, silence, meditating and acting on His written Word and keeping sin from taking hold in our lives. The power to guard our hearts comes from God Himself (2 Timothy 1:13-15). We are in need of God's power to help us guard the heart for prosperity, adversity, danger, great personal need, work and duty, abuse from others, trials and temptations, spiritual doubts and darkness, suffering and sickness. We are also in great need of Spiritual discipline in dealing with the bent toward depravity of the human heart by listening to and heeding the Sage's teachings. To help in guarding our hearts, Proverbs gives us a metaphor for keeping wise teachings close to the heart in 7:1-3:

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<sup>30</sup> Keathley, under heading of "The Heart Must be Guarded"

<sup>31</sup> Waltke, *NICOT*, 2004. p 91-92.

<sup>32</sup> Waltke, *NICOT*, 2005. p 59-60.

<sup>33</sup> "psychosomatic." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, 2013. Web. 3 Aug 2013.

“My child, keep my words and store up my commandments with you; keep my commandments and live, keep my teachings as the apple of your eye; bind them on your fingers, write them on the tablet of your heart.”<sup>34</sup>

The metaphor is explained by Waltke, “for memorization and permanent retention of the father’s commands and teaching.” He continues “...(as an) indelible impression on one’s character...assimilated as a way of life within a person’s governing center.”<sup>35</sup> Proverbs 3:3 echoes this metaphor further stating, “Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.” That passage in Proverbs 3 goes on to point out the importance of trusting in the Lord with all one’s heart and not relying on one’s own wisdom and insight. In Proverbs 4:4, the Sage reminds us to “Let your heart hold fast to my words; keep my commandments and live.”

In Flavel’s words, guarding and nurturing our heart is “the great business of a Christian’s life.”<sup>36</sup> He goes on to exhort all Christians to study the heart, watch over the heart, and keep the heart from foolish pursuits. He begs his readers, in his final sentence to:

...step aside oftener to talk with God and your own heart; that you would not allow every trifle to divert you; that you would keep a more true and faithful account of your thoughts and affections; that you would seriously demand of your own heart at least every evening—'O my heart, where have you been today, and what has engaged your thoughts?’<sup>37</sup>

I would take this one step further. To truly have a healthy heart, we can and must cry out for a new hearts to replace our callused, cold and stony ones (Ezekiel 36:26). Then and only

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<sup>34</sup> *The HarperCollins Study Bible - New Revised Standard Version*. Gen. Ed. Attridge, Harold W. Gen. Ed. Orig. Edition Meeks, Wayne A. 2006. San Francisco: Harper One. p 860.

<sup>35</sup> Waltke, *NICOT*, 2004. p 91-92.

<sup>36</sup> Flavel, John. *Keeping the Heart*. 1998; updated 2012. Series: Puritan Writings. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books / Soli Deo Gloria, introductory statements. Posted in digital form [http://www.gracegems.org/27/keeping\\_the\\_heart.htm](http://www.gracegems.org/27/keeping_the_heart.htm)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

then can we begin to operate with God's Holy Spirit living and dwelling there (I Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:22). Then we can enjoy what the Sages claim to be the very best life can offer through a pure wellspring. With the help of God Almighty, we shall guard our hearts indeed!

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**THE HEART ACCORDING TO THE SAGES**

**BI600 Learning and Living Proverbs  
Dr. Greg Trull**

**Benjamin David Bauman  
Monday, August 5, 2013**