

# The Heart, the Wellspring of Life

Proverbs 4:23

In this hour I want to take you to the book of Proverbs, and we'll study a single text that is one of my favorite verses. Proverbs 4:23. I want you to turn there, because even though this is a short verse, we're going to look at it in context. And while you are turning there, I'll read it to you: "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."

That verse sets forth one of our main duties in the process of our sanctification. In a way, it sums up our *whole* duty in the matter of personal sanctification. So the principle in this verse is one of the most important lessons of the Christian life. If people understood this principle, the workload a lot of pastors face in the counseling room would be greatly reduced. Let me read the same verse from the New International Version, because I think it captures the true meaning so well. It says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." And the New American Standard Bible says, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life."

I have occasionally used this verse as a text for wedding sermons, because the principle it teaches is perfect counsel for a couple entering into married life. "Guard your heart. Watch over it with all diligence." But the point of this command is one of the most practical and essential principles we could ever talk about regarding the way sanctification works. And it applies to every one of us—married and single, young and old, new believer and mature Christian alike.

Here's what this verse is saying: your heart is the fountain-head of life itself. Everything you are and everything you do springs from your heart. Your behavior, your attitudes, your words, and everything

that colors your character flows from your inner person. So you need to *protect* your heart with all diligence—to keep it from becoming dry and empty, poisoned and polluted, or stagnant and bitter. Because if your heart is wrong, everything else in your life will show the effects of it. If your heart is full of garbage, that's what's going to come out in your words and behavior. So above all else, guard your heart.

When I first moved to Southern California twenty-one years ago, one of the first features on the landscape that stood out to me was a very large concrete flume that runs down the hillside on Interstate 5, just before you get to the 14 freeway intersection. The first time I saw it I was riding with John MacArthur, and I joked that it was the biggest water-slide I had ever seen. And he explained what it was: it's water brought down from Northern California. It flows for miles in a concrete aqueduct that brings it downstate, channels it up over the mountains and over that flume, where it empties into the reservoir you can see on the other side of that freeway. And from there it supplies half of the San Fernando Valley with water. That single source of water is essential to keep more than a million people alive. And because of the terrorist threat, the reservoir is constantly kept under careful guard. It is kept full and fresh. It is regularly tested for poisons and pollutants. And it is carefully protected against every conceivable attack, because it is so vital to the life and well-being of our community.

The writer of this proverb is saying that your heart is the reservoir of your life, and the state of your heart determines everything about your character. Of course, he isn't speaking of the literal blood-pumping organ that we know as the heart. But the "heart" spoken of here is that innermost part of our soul that is the seat of our intellect, our emotions, and our will. I spoke last Sunday night in our main service about the spirituality of God, and one of the lessons Jesus drew

from that truth is that true worship should stem from the spirit of man—from our innermost person; from our heart, not just our lips. And Jesus' exact words were "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." So I stressed the fact that true worship is about *truth*—not just raw emotion and mindless sentimentality. It's not the sort of irrational, hand-waving, feelings-based passion people today tend to associate with worship; it engages the entire heart—mind, emotions, and will.

And a guy came up to me after the service saying he was totally confused, because he couldn't reconcile the ideas of heart and mind. He thought of those two things as opposites—with the mind being the seat of rational thought, and the heart being the seat of irrational emotions. I'm afraid a lot of people think in those terms. They imagine that the heart is something irrational and full of raw passion; and the mind is rational and somehow unspiritual. That's contrary to the way Scripture uses those terms. But in the Bible, the heart is virtually equivalent to the mind. The heart is that spiritual, hidden person who thinks and feels and wills—the spirit of the person as distinct from the body.

And our text recognizes this. It's saying that all our energies, our thoughts, our passions, our appetites, our behavior, and ultimately our character derive their source from this hidden fountain and central reservoir—that innermost part of the human soul—which Scripture so often refers to as the *heart*.

The heart is not distinct from the mind. When the Bible uses this expression "the heart," it's never excludes the intellect or the mind. Again, when Scripture speaks of the heart, the mind—the intellectual faculty—is often precisely what Scripture means to signify. In Hebrew terminology, your heart is where your thoughts originate, and your stomach is where you emotions come from. As a matter of fact, the

normal Hebrew expression for the emotions was the word *may-aw*, which meant bowels, or intestines. It referred to the fact that strong emotions are often felt by a tightening sensation in the abdomen. So you have expressions in the King James Version like "bowels of compassion," and in 2 Corinthians 6:12, Paul writes to the church at Corinth, "Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels." That is a literal rendering of the Greek expression. What he meant was that the Corinthians were withholding their affections from him, so he used a Greek word that referred to the abdomen, or the intestines, because that is the part of the body Hebrews associated with the emotions. The ESV translates it this way: "You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections." You are tightening your abdomens against us.

But "the heart" is what Scripture associates primarily with the thought life. And that is also easy to prove from Scripture. The heart is where our thoughts come from. Proverbs 23:7: "as [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he." Psalm 53:1, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Hebrews 4:12 speaks of "the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Jesus said to the scribes in Matthew 9:4: "Why do you think evil in your hearts?" So when Scripture speaks of "the heart," it's talking about the seat of your thought life. The heart is to the intellect what the abdomen is to the emotions.

Now, sometimes in Scripture emotions are *also* associated with the heart, but never in a way that eliminates the mind. The heart is never contrasted with the intellect. In the Bible, joy, fear, gladness, and sorrow are all associated with the heart. But Scripture never treats those feelings—or any other legitimate emotion—as something separate from the intellect. Joy and gladness, fear and sorrow are all emotions that color our thoughts; and those emotions themselves stem from the mind. That's why they are associated

with the heart—the thought life; the imagination; the way you think.

So don't ever think of the heart as something distinct from the mind. The mind simply manifests in thought-form what is in your heart. And likewise, your emotions color the thoughts of your heart. So the heart is the wellspring from which all your thoughts and all your feelings and all your actions ultimately come. That is exactly what this verse is teaching. So be sure that you understand exactly what Scripture means by the heart, it is the innermost part of your soul—the core of your personality—and it is often used virtually as a synonym for the thought life.

Now I hope you have turned to Proverbs 4, because I want to read enough of this passage to give you the full context. The writer (and I believe this is most likely Solomon) is outlining the principles of wisdom. And he inserts a long admonition, beginning with verse 20, urging us to pay careful heed to what he is saying. I'll start reading in Proverbs 4:20, and I'll read through the end of the chapter:

My son, be attentive to my words; incline  
your ear to my sayings.  
21 Let them not escape from your sight;  
keep them within your heart.  
22 For they are life to those who find them,  
and healing to all their flesh.  
23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for  
from it flow the springs of life.  
24 Put away from you crooked speech, and  
put devious talk far from you.  
25 Let your eyes look directly forward, and  
your gaze be straight before you.  
26 Ponder the path of your feet; then all  
your ways will be sure.  
27 Do not swerve to the right or to the left;  
turn your foot away from evil.

Now, notice: in that short passage of Proverbs, the sage is telling us *how* to guard our hearts. He sets forth several practical ways we can safeguard our hearts—by fixing the eyes of our soul on good; by setting the focus of our soul on truth; by removing the feet of our soul from the pathway of evil, and above all by riveting the thoughts of our soul on the godly wisdom of Scripture. So all the verses I just read are closely related to verse 23, which is the key to this passage, and all of them together teach us *how* to guard our hearts, to keep the heart sound and upright, because the heart is the reservoir that supplies the vitality and the character of life itself. That's the central point, and that is the principle I want to look at this morning.

So here are some ways you need to guard your heart, and I'll divide them into three categories to make it easy for you to remember. Try to take these down; I'll make it easy, and there are only three of them. First:

1. KEEP YOUR HEART FRESH AND PURE.

What good is it for the city water supply to be full unless it is also pure? I once stayed in a place in India that drew water from a large local well. And for several days people had been complaining about the taste of the water, so they sent a man to look into the well to find out if it had been contaminated. It was a massive hole in the ground big enough to put a mini-van in it, and shallow enough that the workman could climb down with a ladder and some wading boots. And it was ringed by a short concrete wall to keep people from falling in by accident. So this guy went down to see what he could find. After a few minutes he tossed up out of the well the carcass of a rotting cat.

And when I looked into the well, the stench that came out of it nearly knocked me over. The water in the well was overgrown with water-lilies, and it was the home of hundreds of frogs and lizards and water-snakes and water-bugs. For a minute I comforted

myself with a reminder that I had been drinking bottled water all week. But then it occurred to me that all the rice I had been eating for days had been boiled in water that was drawn from that filthy well. That was probably fifteen years ago, and it still gives me a creepy feeling just to think about it.

An impure heart is even worse. That is exactly what Jesus taught. Matthew 15:19: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person." A corrupt heart produces evil desires, evil thoughts, evil words, and evil deeds. It's like a polluted well, and it spoils everything that comes out of it. That is what makes us sin. In fact, Jesus' point was that an impure heart is the *only* thing that can actually defile us spiritually.

Did you realize that? Have you ever thought about the fact that what emanates from your own heart is far more dangerous to you spiritually than all the temptations and defilement you encounter in the world? In fact, the sin that assaults you externally would be no danger at all if there were not sin in your heart. Nothing you see and nothing that touches you could defile you spiritually if it were not for the sin in your heart. Remember that Jesus lived a lifetime in this sinful world, and He was exposed to every temptation. Scripture says "in every respect [He] has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Even though He gained a reputation for being a friend to sinners, Hebrews 7:26 says He remained "holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens." He went to their homes for meals; He rubbed shoulders with them and showed them mercy, but He wasn't defiled by their sin—even the worst of sinners.

The sin of this world doesn't rub off and defile you from the outside. Only what's in your heart can defile you in that way. James 1:14-15 says, "But each person

is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." And James 4:1 says, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your [own] passions are at war within you?" Everything that defiles you comes from within. You are not sinful because sin rubbed off from the outside and defiled you. The sin that defiles you *all* comes from within.

Now, it's true that we are tempted by the world and the devil as well as by our own fleshly desires, but those things by themselves do not actually defile us. Nothing on the outside can defile you spiritually. They would have no defiling effect on us at all if our own hearts weren't drawn to the evil they tempt us with. So only what comes from within you can defile you spiritually. And Jesus taught that principle explicitly.

Do you remember that incident recorded in Mark 7 when the Pharisees saw the disciples eating their food without washing their hands first? Mark 7:2 says, "they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed." And (verse 5) "the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?'"

Now it wasn't merely physical hygiene that concerned these Scribes and Pharisees. They didn't understand anything about microbiology or germs. That wasn't the issue. But they had a tradition of washing for *ceremonial* reasons. The purpose of their washing before meals wasn't for physical hygiene; it was supposed to cleanse away *spiritual* defilement—or so they thought. This was a purely human tradition; it wasn't anything the Old Testament law prescribed.

There were *some* ceremonial washings commanded in the Old Testament, of course. You may remember that a bronze laver, or washbasin, was part of the furnishings of the Tabernacle. It was placed between



the Tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and whenever the priests came to the altar to make sacrifices, they were required to wash first. Listen to Exodus 30:18-21:

You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it, 19 with which Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet.

20 When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn a food offering to the LORD, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die.

21 They shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die. It shall be a statute forever to them, even to him and to his offspring throughout their generations."

The law *also* prescribed ceremonial washings whenever people were ceremonially defiled by contact with dead bodies or other things that were ceremonially unclean. Again, the point wasn't physical hygiene; the washing was merely *symbolic* for the cleansing away of spiritual defilement. It was a ritual that symbolized what we need spiritually. There was little or no actual antiseptic value in these washings; in fact, it was just water without soap. But it symbolized the *spiritual* purification that was necessary—in the same way that circumcision symbolized a kind of spiritual purification.

But somewhere along the line, the rabbis decided that if one ceremonial washing was good, then two ceremonial washings were better. And so they began to make rules about when you ought to wash in order to cleanse yourself from spiritual defilement you might not even be aware of. And this massive tradition about ceremonial washing began to dominate people's lives.

Some of them believed you couldn't even enter a house without ceremonial washing. The strictest sects even taught that you had to wash one hand first before it could wash the other. And so there was all this ceremony and ritual attached to the practice of washing. You had to go through this elaborate washing ceremony before you could eat a meal.

"What's *wrong* with that?" you might ask. Well, it was wrong for two reasons. First of all, it made a religious ceremony of something God hadn't even commanded. This system of ceremonial washings epitomized what Jesus meant when he said in Matthew 23:4-5 that the Pharisees "They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others."

And that was the second reason all these ceremonial washings were wrong. It was all for show. The ceremony of washing externalized something that was meant to be internal and spiritual. They took a spiritual symbol and tried to make the ritual itself efficacious for purification. They had confused physical defilement with spiritual defilement, and it made them forget that what they needed to labor to keep pure was their heart, not their hands. Germs on the hands cannot defile you spiritually. It's the wickedness in your heart, not the dirt on your hands, that renders you unfit for the kingdom of heaven. Ceremonial defilement is just that: it's symbolic; it's ceremonial. It is not real spiritual defilement. *Spiritual* defilement comes from within.

And so when the scribes and Pharisees criticized the disciples for eating with unwashed hands, Jesus Himself seized the opportunity to teach this lesson. Mark 7:15. He said: "There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him."

Later, He went on to explain privately to His disciples:

whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him,

19 since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

20 And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. [And here is the parallel passage to the statement from Matthew I quoted earlier:]

21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual

immorality, theft, murder, adultery,

22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Listen, if you want to keep your life pure, you must guard the purity of your heart. I have some friends who are neat freaks. One of my friends carries a little bottle of Purell with him, and he always washes his hands before every meal. Nothing wrong with that. It's what our mothers teach us to do, and it's a good way to ward off germs. But if you want to be *spiritually* pure, you have to exercise a different kind of diligence to keep your heart pure.

How do you do that? Romans 13:14: "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." Romans 12:2: "be transformed by the renewal of your mind." Hebrews 10:22: "draw near [to God] with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience."

Keep your heart pure by "present[ing] yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness" (Romans 6:13). Don't fill your heart with

that which is *impure*. Don't read books or look at images that stir unwholesome thought or immoral desires. Don't let your imagination entertain evil thoughts. Keep your heart pure.

This requires *diligence*, according to our text. Again, it is something you must *do*. This is your spiritual duty. Philippians 4:8: "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, 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." "Hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22). And here's some more practical advice for keeping your heart pure from 2 Peter 1:5-8:

For this very reason, [Peter says, so that you can "become partakers of the divine nature {and escape} from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire"—for this very reason] make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, load your heart with godly virtue, and the fruit of that virtue is inevitable—because out of the heart flow the springs of life.

But if your heart is impure, the fruit of that impurity will eventually be manifest as well. As Jesus said in Matthew 7:17-18: "every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear

good fruit." It's a simple principle, and it is the key to our sanctification. "Keep your heart with all vigilance"—and above all, keep it fresh and pure.

Look at the context of our verse for some practical clues about how to keep your heart pure. Verse 24: "Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you." Put away a deceitful mouth and perverse lips. Rid your heart and your lips of all lying, and everything that's perverse, and everything that's unkind. That same principle is echoed in Ephesians 4:25: "put away falsehood, [and] let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor." Colossians 3:8-9: "But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices." And 1 Peter 2:1-2: "So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow." There's good advice for keeping your heart fresh and pure: put off the old man and put on the new.

And then (Proverbs 4:25-27) fix your heart on righteousness and don't turn aside from it:

Let your eyes look directly forward, and  
your gaze be straight before you.

26 Ponder the path of your feet; then all  
your ways will be sure.

27 Do not swerve to the right or to the left;  
turn your foot away from evil.

That's how you keep your heart fresh and pure

Here's a second way you need to guard your heart.  
Number 2 in that list of three you are making:

## 2. KEEP YOUR HEART FULL AND LARGE

A reservoir that supplies water for a community is useless if it goes dry. Likewise with the human heart. You must keep your heart full. Fill it up with good things. Make your heart large. Or rather, let the Lord enlarge your heart.

Feed on things that edify your soul. Pour into your heart that which nourishes and satisfies. Keep it full to overflowing. Keep it full of good and holy things and it will never go dry.

In Psalm 87:7, we find this prayer addressed to God: "All my springs are in you." If God is the wellspring that supplies your heart, the reservoir will stay full enough. He'll make sure your cup runs over.

By the way, there is no *other* way to keep your heart from becoming dry and empty. People try all kinds of things to mask the emptiness of their hearts—they pursue worldly amusements that occupy their time, and they fill their time with entertainments that distract their minds, but none of those things can ever fill an empty heart. There is only one way to obtain fulness of heart, and it is by tapping into springs of living water.

Jesus said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water' (John 7:37-38). He told the woman at the well in John 4:14: "whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." Revelation 22:17, the last, great invitation in Scripture, says, "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price."

That's the way to have a full heart: Turn from sin, come to Christ for salvation, and then learn to nourish your heart at the streams of living water. Isaiah 12:2-3

says, "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." I like that expression: "draw water from the wells of salvation." It's a never-ending supply, and again, if you do these things you shall never be barren or unfruitful. It's a simple principle.

What does it mean to draw water out of the wells of salvation? I think it means to feed your soul with the truths of the gospel. Study and meditate on the grace of God. Preach the gospel to yourself constantly—reminding yourself of your own sin, your inability to atone for that sin, Christ's atoning work on your behalf, and your spiritual union with Him.

Romans 8:16-17 says "we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ." How could our hearts ever be dry or barren if we feed on those truths? How could we be small-hearted people?

If you continually revisit the foot of the cross, your heart will be bathed in Christ's love. If you spend time each day in His presence, your heart will be full of His joy. If you feed your soul daily through His Word, your heart will be full of His wisdom. If you humble yourself before the Lord, your heart will be full of His grace, because "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

If you keep your passion for God alive, your heart will never go dry. It's as simple as that.

Be diligent to do it. Fill your heart with good things. Shun those things that tend to make your heart cold and dry. Drink freely from the water of life. If you truly know Christ, and love Him, it should not be hard to keep a full heart.

Look again at the context of our verse for another practical way to keep your heart full and large.

Proverbs 4:20-22: "My son, be attentive to my words;

incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh." Incline your ear to wisdom, and keep the words of godly wisdom in your heart. Memorize and meditate on Scripture, and your heart will never be empty.

So you should have this list so far: keep your heart fresh and pure; keep it full and large. Here's a third way you need to guard your heart. Number 3 on your list:

### 3. KEEP YOUR HEART FLOWING AND ACTIVE

Notice how frequently Scripture speaks about rivers of living water and cups running over. The psalmist writes these words of praise to God in Psalm 36:9, "with you is the *fountain* of life." And Proverbs 16:22 says, "Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him who has it." The water of life is always pictured as flowing freely, running over, and springing up. It's not a stagnant pool.

In fact, the nonstop, free-flowing motion of any stream is one of the things that keeps it fresh and pure. It's what enables the cisterns to be full and large. So keep it flowing and active. Give out what you take in. Share it with others.

Don't let your heart stagnate, or it will become bitter as the waters of Marah. Let it be "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

I already quoted that familiar statement of Jesus from John 7:38. Listen to it again: "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." What Scripture was he talking about? I think this is one of those places where He had in mind the general teaching of Scripture and not just a single text. There are several passages in the Old Testament that set forth this principle. Proverbs 10:11 says, "The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life." Proverbs 18:4 says, "The words of a man's mouth are



as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook." In other words, the water of life and the wellspring of wisdom flow through the believer so that we become instruments in God's hands, bringing life and salvation to others through the ministry of the gospel. That, at least in part, is what Jesus meant when he spoke of the rivers of living water that flow through us.

But He also means something even more specific than that. Notice that the apostle John adds this commentary after John 7:38. Verse 39 says, "But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive." In other words, when Jesus spoke of the wellspring of living water, he was speaking of the Holy Spirit, who is so often symbolized in the Old Testament with the imagery of living water. Isaiah 44:3 God says, "For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, And floods on the dry ground; [Now, notice the parallelism: Pouring water on him who is thirsty is the same thought as the next phrase:] I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, And My blessing on your offspring." Zechariah 14:8 also promises that in the millennial kingdom, "living waters shall go out from Jerusalem." Ezekiel 47:1-12 is a long passage about the rivers of living water that will flow from Jerusalem in the Millennial kingdom. It's all symbolic language that speaks of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, flowing unhindered into all the world during Christ's earthly reign.

But the same principle is true even now in the life of each individual believer. It is the indwelling spirit of God in the believer who guarantees that our cups will overflow and the river of living water will never run out. It is the Holy Spirit's ministry within us and through us that Jesus spoke of when he said rivers of living water would flow out of our hearts.

The Spirit is who keeps our hearts fresh and full and overflowing. And it is the Spirit of God in us that enables us to share the water of life with others.

And because the river of life is an inexhaustible supply, the more we pour out our hearts in ministry, the more we are filled up again. Listen to these prophetic words from Isaiah 58:10-11. The Lord is speaking to the remnant of Israel, and He says, "If you extend your soul to the hungry And satisfy the afflicted soul, Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, And your darkness shall be as the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, And satisfy your soul in drought, And strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail."

So the best way to keep our hearts flowing and active is to keep pouring them out in ministry to others. And in order to do that, we have to be filled with the Spirit of God, and let His fullness flow through us continually.

This also has the effect of keeping our hearts fresh and pure. Galatians 5:16: "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." And it's also what keeps our hearts full and large. Ephesians 5:18: "Be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

So keep your heart fresh and pure. Keep it full and large. And keep it flowing and active. The only way to accomplish all these things is to be filled with the Spirit and to walk in His power.

Let me say, too, before we close, that if you are not a believer in Christ, your heart is not worth keeping. You need to get rid of it. It is a heart of stone—dead, cold, and spiritually lifeless. You need to ask God to remove the stony heart and give you a heart of flesh, so that you can walk in His statutes and keep His ordinances, and do them. Christ specializes in that kind of heart-

renewal. That's what the new birth is all about, according to Ezekiel 36:26-27.

If you are in Christ, you are already a new creature, with a new heart. Guard that heart carefully. Keep it fresh; keep it full; keep it flowing with living water.

Perhaps the best way to sum up the message of this verse would be to paraphrase something John Gill wrote. He said if you want to keep your heart diligently the way this proverb commands: Keep your mind from vanity. Keep your understanding from error. Keep your will from perverseness. Keep your conscience clear of guilt. Keep your affections set on heavenly things. Keep your thoughts from evil things. And keep the whole of your heart from falling into the hands of the enemy. You *must* exercise great diligence, since the heart is naturally deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. A strict eye must therefore be kept upon it. All the avenues to it must be watched so that nothing hurtful enters and nothing evil comes out. It is to be kept by every spiritual means available to us—by prayer, by hearing, by reading, by meditation; and, above all, by being filled with the Spirit of God, who is the only One able to sanctify, preserve, and keep our hearts.