Guarding Over Your Soul and the Souls of Others
Proverbs 4:23

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

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Today's message addresses ways Christians can practice spiritual watchfulness. It concerns ways to best protect our heart and soul to preserve a solid, resolute relationship with the Lord. Additionally, I want to mention some ways we can watch over the souls of those around us. How many would agree that it is important to guard the heart and soul?

When we become Christians it takes more than simply praying the "Sinner's Prayer" to overcome the world and live victoriously. It takes a deep commitment toward Christ and devotion to His Word.

(Transition) As a Christian minister, I find it necessary to open this message by noting the special assignment God has given to Gospel preachers to help others guard their souls. The Lord has placed a mandate upon his servants to compassionately watch over his flock. This assignment is called **"The Principle of Spiritual Guidance."** On occasions, this is an awkward and uncomfortable assignment. But discomfort is never an excuse for a minister to abdicate his commission. God's mandate remains intractable.

I. The Minister's Duty to Watch Over Souls

Let me point out several passages that underscore this responsibility:

> Paul said in Hebrews 13:17, "Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, **because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account."**
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> The Lord's warning in Ezekiel 3:17—18 is even stronger when he says this: "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. (18) If I say to the wicked man, 'You will surely die,' but you do not warn him or speak out to warn him from his wicked way to save his life, that wicked man will die in his iniquity, and I will hold you responsible for his blood."
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> Again, Paul told Timothy these words: "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: (2) **Preach the word;**

> **be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage**—with great patience and careful instruction. (3) For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. (4) They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." (2 Timothy 4:1—4).

The Principle of Spiritual Guidance is highly valuable. It can turn good people from spiritual danger. As Christians, we benefit greatly when we recognize that God has uniquely gifted ministers to keep people on track. They are anointed to provide direction, correction, and instruction.

(Example) And look, I'll be the first to admit that listening to a message of rebuke or correction can often be uncomfortable. But I'd rather take some discomfort in redirecting my course than plowing headstrong the wrong way! If the road is washed out around the curve, I don't want to drive on with unfettered acceleration. I want somebody to help with my "blind spot."

Notice the words of the wise man that wrote Psalm 141:5, "Let a righteous man strike me—that is a kindness; let him rebuke me—that is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it…." Whoever wrote this Psalm understood the value of godly correction.

Sadly, in the OT, God's people didn't always take advantage of the wonderful guidance they received through the Prophets:

> Jeremiah 11:7—8 says: "From the time I brought your ancestors up from Egypt until today, I warned them again and again, saying, "Obey me." (8) But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubbornness of their evil hearts. So I brought on them all the curses of the covenant I had commanded them to follow but that they did not keep.'"

> Jeremiah 26:5—6 says: "If you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened), (6) then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city a curse among all the nations of the earth."

Always note the value of a true, prophetic warning from a messenger of God! It's God's loving way of guiding us into the paths of righteousness for his name's sake! This is the precise benefit the Apostle Paul pointed out in 2 Corinthians 10:8. He said, "So even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us [it's] for building you up rather than tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it." A rightly timed message of correction will always benefit you.

(Illustration) Years ago, I employed a Youth Pastor named Doug. As he and I talked one day, he related a story from his teen years when he had taken a job and had begun to tithe. One Sunday, he decided to withhold his giving. But the Pastor didn't let this go unnoticed. The very next day the Pastor contacted him and said: "Doug, I saw that you didn't give your tithes yesterday. What's going on?" [I have to admit that I've never been so bold as to do that.] But that Pastor's courage was the perfect remedy for Doug. He said, from that day forward, it kept him on track with tithing.

I do need to say this: Be wary of anyone who comes with a corrective message that does not present it with love, compassion, and the mercy of Christ. Jesus had some severe words he leveled against the Jewish leaders, but he was also abounding and overflowing with love.

(Transition) Now that I've mentioned the minister's duty to watch over the souls of others, I want to discuss how all Christians must make due diligence to watch over their own souls.

II. Christians Must Watch Over Their Soul

Everyone here is vulnerable to Satan's traps when they fail to maintain watchfulness. It's why Scripture is laden with exhortations to stay alert and avoid temptations. For example:

> 1 Corinthians 16:13 says: "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong."
>
> Here's what Jesus said in Mark 14:38, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."
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> 1 Peter 4:7 says: "The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray."
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> Jesus said in Luke 21:36, "Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

These are precepts we must understand if we are to live the Christian life victoriously. We have to be fully committed to this lifestyle. As Jesus said, "Be always on the watch." **You see, nobody turns their back on the Lord and loses their soul overnight. It's typically a gradual process:**

1. It begins by neglecting personal devotion toward Christ.
2. Next, we allow unholy affections to allure our hearts.
3. It continues by surrendering a deeply held conviction—something we marked as taboo becomes permissible.
4. At some point, we start indulging in temptations that never bothered us.
5. Ultimately, this pattern results in being trapped in sin.

(Illustration) Years ago, I was reading about the aeronautical precision that is required to accurately guide large commercial aircraft. The article stated that when a 747 jet is tracked, timepieces need to be coordinated with pinpoint precision. Even a miscalculation of one-tenth of a second could create a miss-tracking of the aircraft by two miles!

In the same way, we must always seek to keep our heart and soul on course. Thus, what are the best ways for Christians to guard against Satan's traps and stand firm in Christ?

1. Live with the constant awareness that Satan looks for someone to devour. The Apostle Peter said: "Be alert and of sober mind. **"**Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). How many here understand that the devil hates you and wants to ruin your relationship with Christ?

2. Commit to regular times of prayer.

3. Set personal convictions of right and wrong. It's okay to live with moral certitude! Be convinced of what is right or wrong for you. As you implement this practice it will help you recognize Christ's lordship over every area of your life.

4. Faithfully study the Scriptures.

5. Worship corporately at your local church, and if possible, get involved. The easiest prey for Satan is those who are spiritually idle.

Let's notice one more passage of Scripture that helps maintain vigilance over our souls. It's found in 2 Peter 1:5—11.

> For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; (6) and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; (7) and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. (8) **For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.** (9) But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. (10) Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every

> effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, (11) **and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

What a remarkable promise!

(Transition) Now I want to move to Point Three of this message. And rather than look inward, I want us to look outward. That's because the Lord has not only given the responsibility to watch over our own souls, but we are to care deeply about the spiritual welfare of our loved ones and fellow Christians.

III. Christians Should Watch over the Welfare of Loved Ones & Fellow Christians

Most importantly, we should seek to guard the spiritual welfare of our home. As I share this point with you I want to especially illustrate the parents' and grandparents' duty of watching over the souls of their children. The analogy I'm about to make is ***not so*** hypothetical either! How many have heard a statement like this:

> ***As a parent, I don't want to interfere with the beliefs of my children regarding religion. If they want to believe in pluralism—that all roads lead to Heaven, that's fine! This is why I don't make them go to church; they should learn to think for themselves and form their own values. And yes, I think school kids need a well-rounded education. They need to hear about evolution, and socialism and communism, and have access to free thought. They need educators that will introduce them to atheism and agnosticism. I don't believe in shoving any ideology down their throats. I want them to grow up and develop their own standards about life and morality.***

How ridiculous! Can you imagine just one branch of secular society making the same statement? Of course not! Godless, worldly people are not fair-minded! When given the chance, the world seeks to silence Christians, brand our principles as "Hate Speech," and then force-feed our kids their garbage! And by the way, if you and I don't teach our children Biblical values, then which part of the world is going to step forward to take our place? When is the last time your child or grandchild came home from a secular event and said, "Mom, Dad, I was told to attend church this weekend so I could think for myself and make an informed decision about cultural truths"? It never happens.

Here is what the Bible says about child-rearing and watching over the souls of our youth. It's found in Deuteronomy 6:4—8:

> Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. (5) Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (6) These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. (7) **Impress them** on your children. **Talk about the**m when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (8) **Tie them as symbols** on your hands and **bind them** on your foreheads. (9) **Write them** on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

If you want to give your children the best opportunity possible of serving the Lord when they are adults, then anchor them in the Word of God when they are young!

(Transition) But as Christians, our responsibility to watch over souls should expand beyond our immediate family. Our watchfulness should affect our extended family and even our church family.

Watching Over the Souls of Fellow Believers

I'm not suggesting that Christians police the ranks or become spiritual watchdogs. Nobody wants a Christian "Private Eye" snooping around and scrutinizing every move they make. Nevertheless, the Bible clearly charges us with this responsibility.

If the Kingdom of God is truly an association of brothers and sisters in Christ that is bound together by love, then we have an obligation to compassionately watch over the welfare of each other. The love of God should motivate us to help erring Believers.

And it does not matter whether someone is a doorkeeper at the House of God or the Archbishop of the world's largest denomination—Scripture shows that no one is exempt from the loving correction of others. And the Bible illustrates this through none other than David—the person described as being "a man after God's own heart."

(Bible Example) One day, David approached Joab, his Secretary of Defense and Five-Star General, with orders to go throughout Israel and number the fighting men. Joab couldn't believe that David would dare demand this in violation of Moses' Law. Moses had commanded that any census of Israel should include a special tax from the people. But David had not included one! Here's how Joab pleaded with him in 2 Samuel 24:3—4, "May the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king still see it, but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?" (4) The king's word, however, overruled Joab and the army commanders; so they left the presence of the king to enroll the fighting men of Israel." Moreover, the nation suffered terribly when David rejected Joab's counsel—a plague suddenly arose that decimated 70,000 Israelites.

No matter who we are, and no matter how spiritual we think we are, no one is so perfect that they have no need of godly counsel. Always stay open to the wise, godly counsel of those who love you.

(Transition) So how do Christians watch over the souls of fellow believers? There are several ways, and I'll mention five.

How to Watch Over the Welfare of Fellow Believers

1. Hold your close Christian friends accountable by having regular "spiritual" conversations with them:

a. Inquire about their times of devotion with the Lord.
b. Ask them how God is speaking to them during these moments.
c. Ask if there is anything you can help them pray about.

2. Contact fellow Believers when you notice them missing church. You don't have to scold them, and you *might* not even have to say you've missed them in church. Just let them know they have been on your heart, and then share an encouraging word with them. ***Encouragement without condemnation can often work wonders!***

3. When you see a fellow Believer willfully straying, try to speak with them. You may want to include a testimony of your past struggle with temptation and how God helped you overcome it. Challenge them to draw close to God and invite his help.

4. When nothing else seems possible in helping others, always remember that you *can* pray!

5. And here's a "rule of thumb" that always works: when you see a Believer struggling with sin, doing *something* is always preferable to doing *nothing!*

Consider the reward of helping someone turn from a wrong path. The Apostle James mentioned this in James 5:19—20. "My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, (20) remember this: **Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins."**

Even now, I believe the Holy Spirit has spoken to hearts. He's most likely convicted people during this service of something that is destructive. If so, listen to his voice. He cares for you.

(Transition) The last point I want to discuss is the responsibility Christians have to watch over the souls of unbelievers.

IV. The Christian's Responsibility to Watch Over Unbelievers

Christians are Heaven's ambassadors that God uses to share the testimony of Christ's grace and love. All Christians *get* to do this! And there is no joy so complete that compares with winning a sinner to Christ.

And everyone here is acquainted with someone who needs to hear about Jesus. God has somebody for you to reach.

Maybe you're thinking that you aren't skilled in the art of sharing the Gospel of salvation. Well, let me show you what you can do:

1. Invite someone to attend church with you. Tell them you will meet them here at 10:30 on Sunday morning.

2. Secondly, pray for the unconverted. The wheels of evangelism turn on the power of intercession. The Lord will not allow your prayer to go unnoticed.

3. Thirdly, perhaps you are a bold person who likes to share Christ with others. If so, I urge you to petition God for opportunities to share the Gospel. Ask for the Holy Spirit to direct sinners into your path.

The Lord has a specific emphasis on soul-winning in the last days. In Matthew 13:30 and Revelation 14:14—16, Christ referred to the end of the age as the *"harvest."* Think about that! Jesus calls the Endtime "the harvest." That means the closer we draw to Christ's Coming, the greater the opportunity to reap souls. It refers to a time when many souls would be swept into the kingdom. Since Bible prophecy indicates these are the Last Days, we can work with the expectancy that God will reward our endeavors. It's time to witness the words of Christ come to pass when he said: *"Go and compel them [unbelievers] to come in that My house will be full" (Luke 14:23)*.

God has already opened the doors of evangelism for us. The fields are ready to harvest, the fruit is ripe, and the fish are waiting to be caught. God is waiting for someone to take action.

Conclusion

These are the ways God has ordained for watching over our souls and the souls of others. I hope you will commit to them.

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