

S E R M O N & B I B L E S T U D Y P R E P A R A T I O N

Stewardship of the Heart

Guarding the Wellspring of Life

***“Keep thy heart with all diligence;
for out of it are the issues of life.”***

Proverbs 4:23 (KJV)

Series: **Stewardship — Faithful Over a Few Things** (Matthew 25:21)

Full Sermon Manuscript

Doctrinal Foundation: **Oneness Apostolic (UPCI)**

Church Triumphant Wellington

OPENING

Walk-up / Warm-up

[Stand. Smile. Pause.]

Church, I want you to say this out loud with me:

“Lord... help me be faithful.”

Again: “Lord... help me be faithful.”

Now say: “Starting... in my heart.”

Because stewardship is not only about money. It's not only about time. It's not only about gifts and serving.

Real stewardship begins inside.

Before God ever entrusts you with more, He looks at how you handle what you already have—starting with your heart. And here's what I love about that: God doesn't look at our hearts to condemn us. He looks at our hearts because He wants to **grow** us. He's a good Father who is invested in our development.

Tonight, we are going to talk about something that shapes your direction, your decisions, your relationships, your worship, your prayer life, your purity, and your peace.

Your heart.

And I believe the Holy Ghost wants to do something beautiful in this room tonight.

OPENING PRAYER

[Bow head.]

Father, in the name of Jesus, we thank You for Your Word.

Let the Word of God be sharp, living, and powerful.

Search us, O God. We don't hide from You tonight.

Expose what needs to be exposed. Uproot what needs to be uprooted.

Strengthen what needs to be strengthened.

Give us clean hands and a pure heart.

Let this be more than information—make it transformation.

In Jesus' name—amen.

READING THE TEXT

[Slow down. Read clearly.]

Proverbs 4:23 (KJV)

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”

Let me read it again:

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”

Church, if there is one verse that summarizes this message, it's that verse right there.

God is telling us: Guard it. Protect it. Manage it. Keep it. Steward it.

Because your heart is a source. And whatever is in the source eventually shows up in the stream. And here's the good news—God didn't give us this instruction to frustrate us. He gave it to us because He knows there's something beautiful inside of us worth protecting.

1) WHAT THE BIBLE MEANS BY “HEART”

Now when the Bible talks about the heart, it’s not just talking about emotions. It goes much deeper than that, and I think this is really going to help you.

| Language | Word | Meaning |
|-------------|--------------------|---|
| Hebrew (OT) | leb / lebab | The inner person: mind, will, desires, affections, conscience |
| Greek (NT) | kardia | The center of inner life: motives, thoughts, character, moral direction |

So when God says “keep your heart,” He’s not only saying “watch your feelings.” He’s saying: **Watch your inner world.** Because your inner world shapes your outer life.

[Pause.]

That’s why Scripture says:

- **Deuteronomy 6:5** — Love the Lord with all your heart.
- **Matthew 15:18–19** — Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts and actions.
- **Hebrews 4:12** — The Word discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Your heart is your control center. If you win the heart, you win the life.

2) WHY THE HEART MUST BE GUARDED

The Big “Why”

Point A — Because the heart determines direction

The Bible says in Proverbs 23:7:

“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.”

Not just as he thinks in his mind... as he thinks in his **heart**. Because the heart is where thoughts become beliefs, and beliefs become behavior. This is actually encouraging when you think about it—because it means if you can shift what’s happening in the heart, you can shift the whole direction of your life.

Now here’s why guarding matters:

Jeremiah 17:9 tells us the heart is **deceitful above all things**.

That’s not God insulting us. That’s God being honest with us because He loves us. He’s saying: your heart doesn’t always tell you the truth, so don’t just follow it—**lead it**.

And Jesus said:

Luke 6:45 — “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.”

Here’s what that means practically: what’s in the heart eventually comes out. We see it when we’re under pressure. We see it when we’re tired. And listen—that’s not meant to make you feel guilty. That’s meant to make you **aware**. Because awareness is the first step toward growth.

[Lean in. Warm tone.]

Your heart determines your direction—and God wants to help you steer it well.

Cross References — Point A

Proverbs 23:7 — *For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...*

Solomon is warning about a stingy host—his outward generosity masks an inward grudge. The heart reveals the real person.

Jeremiah 17:9 — *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

Jeremiah writes during Judah's final years before exile. The nation looked religious outwardly but their hearts had drifted far from God.

Luke 6:45 — *...for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.*

Part of Jesus' Sermon on the Plain—teaching that fruit always reveals the root.

Proverbs 4:23 — *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*

Illustration: David vs. Joseph

Let me show you the difference between an unguarded heart and a stewarded heart—and I want you to see yourself in both of these men, because most of us have been both at different times in our walk.

David, in **2 Samuel 11**, didn't fall into sin in one moment. It started with small drifts—staying back when he should have been at war, lingering when he should have moved, looking when he should have turned away. David's rooftop was not the beginning—David's heart was the beginning.

But Joseph, in **Genesis 39**, when temptation came, Joseph **ran**. Why? Because Joseph had already decided in his heart, "I will not sin against God." He didn't have more willpower than David. He had a more **guarded heart**.

And here's what I want you to hear tonight—even David found his way back. Psalm 51 is the proof that a broken heart can become a clean heart. God is in the business of restoration.

Historical Insight: The Walls of the Ancient Heart

In ancient Israel, cities like Jerusalem were protected by massive stone walls—some up to 25 feet thick. Archaeologists have uncovered the Broad Wall from Hezekiah's time (2 Chronicles 32:5), built urgently when the Assyrian army was marching toward the city. Hezekiah didn't wait until the enemy arrived to start building. He prepared in advance.

That's exactly what God is saying in Proverbs 4:23. Don't wait for the attack to start guarding. Build the wall **before** the pressure comes. A city with strong walls doesn't fear the siege—and a heart with strong boundaries doesn't crumble under temptation.

You don't rise to the level of your gifts—you rise to the level of your heart. And God is ready to help you build it.

Point B — Because the heart is a fountain

Proverbs 4:23 says, “Out of it are the issues of life.”

That word “**issues**” carries the idea of **outflows**—like streams coming from a spring. Isn’t that a beautiful picture? God designed your heart to be a **source of life**.

So the question isn’t whether your heart is producing something—it always is. The question is:

What kind of water is coming from your spring?

Jesus taught us that the real issue is always internal before it’s external.

Mark 7:21–23 — “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.”

And James explains the progression:

James 1:14–15 — “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

Now watch this progression—this is so important to understand, because it shows us **where to catch it early**:

- Sin doesn’t start with behavior—it starts upstream.
- It starts with desire.
- And desire lives in the heart.

That’s why David prayed one of the most honest prayers in all of Scripture:

Psalms 51:10 — “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”

Not “fix my image.” Not “repair my reputation.” **Clean my heart.** David knew where the real work needed to happen. And God honored that prayer—and He’ll honor it for you too.

Cross References — Point B

Proverbs 4:23 — *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*

The Hebrew word for “issues” is “totsa’oth”—literally the place where water flows out. Solomon pictures the heart as a wellspring.

Mark 7:21–23 — *For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts...*

Jesus is responding to the Pharisees who obsessed over ritual hand-washing. He redirects them: contamination isn’t on your hands—it’s in your heart.

James 1:14–15 — *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust...*

James uses the metaphor of a fish being lured by bait. Desire is the hook—the heart is where the bait lands.

Psalms 51:10 — *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*

David writes this after Nathan confronts him about Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12). The word “create” is “bara”—the same word used in Genesis 1:1. David is asking for something only God can do.

Real-Life Application

Let me bring it close to home—and I’m preaching to myself here too:

- When bitterness sits in the heart long enough, it starts to show up in our **tone**.
- When lust goes unchecked, it begins to influence our **eyes and decisions**.
- When pride takes root, it reshapes how we **treat people**.
- When offense settles in, it creates **distance**—from people and from God.

Stop trying to change the stream and let God deal with the spring. He’s not here to embarrass you—He’s here to set you free. But you have to let Him in.

Point C — Because God sees the heart (and that’s actually good news)

This is stewardship—meaning one day we answer to God. And I want you to sit with that for a moment. God is not fooled by what we show on the outside. He sees what’s really there. But here’s what makes that good news instead of terrifying news: He doesn’t look at your heart to destroy you. He looks at it because He wants to **redeem** it. He sees past your mess and into your potential.

God told Samuel:

1 Samuel 16:7 — “But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”

Think about that. People may misjudge you. People may only see your worst moment. But God sees your heart—your hunger, your intentions, your desire to grow. And He weighs that.

Proverbs 21:2 — “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts.”

Hebrews 10:22 — “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”

So here’s what I want to say to you tonight: **stop pretending with God**. He already knows what’s in there. You’re not hiding anything from Him. And the fact that He still says “draw near” means He’s not done with you—so don’t you be done with Him.

God doesn’t look at your heart to condemn you—but He does look. And what He finds, He wants to fix. Will you let Him?

Cross References — Point C

1 Samuel 16:7 — *...for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.*

God sends Samuel to Jesse’s house to anoint a new king. Seven sons pass by—all impressive on the outside. God rejects every one until David, the overlooked shepherd boy, arrives.

Proverbs 21:2 — *Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts.*

The word “pondereth” means to weigh on a scale—like a jeweler examining precious stones. God evaluates with precision and care.

Hebrews 10:22 — *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith...*

The writer echoes the Day of Atonement language—when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies. Now, through Jesus, every believer can draw near with confidence.

Acts 5:3–4 — *But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost...?*

A sobering reminder that God sees what is hidden. Ananias’ sin wasn’t giving—it was pretending. God doesn’t demand perfection, but He does honor honesty.

[Pause.]

And that’s why the prayer “Search me, O God” is one of the bravest and most beautiful prayers you can pray. It’s not fear—it’s **trust**.

3) HOW TO STEWARD THE HEART

The “How”

Now let’s get practical. Because good preaching doesn’t just tell you what’s wrong—it gives you handles for what’s right. And God always gives us a path forward.

Step 1 — Guard what enters

If the heart is a gate, then you and I get to decide what comes through. That’s not restriction—that’s **wisdom**. And it’s one of the most empowering things God has given us: the ability to choose what we let in.

The psalmist said:

Psalm 101:3 — “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.”

And Paul said:

1 Corinthians 15:33 — “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.”

And Philippians gives us a beautiful filter:

Philippians 4:8 — “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

What you repeatedly consume eventually becomes what you consistently crave. So steward what enters—because your heart is worth protecting.

Cross References — Step 1

Psalm 101:3 — *I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes...*

David writes this as a personal commitment for how he will govern—starting with what he allows into his own life.

1 Corinthians 15:33 — *Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.*

Paul actually quotes the Greek poet Menander here. Even secular wisdom recognizes: what you surround yourself with shapes you.

Philippians 4:8 — *...whatsoever things are true...think on these things.*

Paul writes this from a Roman prison cell. Even in chains, he’s choosing what to dwell on. The filter works in every circumstance.

Matthew 6:22–23 — *The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.*

Jesus teaches that what you fix your eyes on determines whether your entire inner life is lit up or dark.

[Practical examples. Gentle, honest tone.]

And I say this with love—because I’m talking to myself too:

- Sometimes we’re praying for a clean heart while consuming things that work against that prayer.
- Sometimes we’re asking God for peace while feeding our minds with things that produce anxiety.
- Sometimes we’re asking God for purity while leaving open doors that invite temptation.

Real-Life Insight: The Flint Water Crisis

In 2014, the city of Flint, Michigan switched its water source to the Flint River to save money. Within months, residents noticed discolored, foul-smelling water. Investigations revealed dangerous levels of lead had leached into the water supply. Over 100,000 people were exposed. The source had been contaminated—and everything downstream suffered.

That’s exactly what happens spiritually. When the source is compromised, everything connected to it is affected. But here’s the hope: Flint’s water was eventually restored through massive effort and new

infrastructure. And God can do the same for our hearts—He doesn't just patch the pipes. He gives us **new water** (John 4:14).

Stewardship says: I'm going to partner with God and close the gate—not because I have to, but because my heart is worth it.

Step 2 — Cleanse it regularly (repentance and forgiveness)

Stewardship is not pretending you're fine. And let me be honest—some of us have been pretending for a long time. We've gotten good at looking clean on the outside while the inside is cluttered. Stewardship is keeping short accounts with God. It's refusing to let things pile up until they own you.

1 John 1:9 — “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Did you catch that? **Faithful** and **just**. That means it's in His nature to forgive. He's not reluctant. He's ready. And David prayed:

Psalm 139:23–24 — “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

And Paul said:

2 Corinthians 7:1 — “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

A heart that is checked regularly stays soft. A heart that is neglected slowly hardens. God wants yours tender and alive.

And Hebrews reminds us:

Hebrews 3:12–13 — “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

Cross References — Step 2

1 John 1:9 — *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us...*

The word “confess” is “homologeō”—to say the same thing as God. It's agreeing with God about what's there, not defending it.

Psalm 139:23–24 — *Search me, O God, and know my heart...*

David isn't afraid of God's examination. He's inviting it—because he trusts that what God finds, God can fix.

2 Corinthians 7:1 — *...let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit...*

Paul connects cleansing to God's promises—we clean up not because we're afraid but because we've been given something worth protecting.

Hebrews 3:12–13 — *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief...*

The writer warns the church by pointing back to Israel in the wilderness—a generation that saw miracles but let their hearts harden through unbelief.

[Lead them gently.]

Tonight might be the night God deals with something you've been avoiding. And I say that with love—but I also say it with urgency. Maybe it's:

- an offense you've been holding onto and calling it “discernment”
- a jealousy that's been eating at you every time someone else gets blessed
- a compromise that started small but has grown comfortable
- a delayed obedience that has turned into outright disobedience
- a coldness in worship that you've stopped fighting

- an unforgiveness you've justified so long you've forgotten it's sin

God is not standing far off with folded arms. But He's also not pretending everything is fine when it's not. He loves you enough to tell you the truth—and strong enough to walk you through the fix.

Step 3 — Fill it intentionally (Word, Spirit, worship)

Jesus taught that an empty house is dangerous (Matthew 12:43–45).

So stewardship is not only “remove the wrong.” It's also **“replace with the right.”** And this is the exciting part—because God hasn't just told us to empty ourselves. He's told us to **fill** ourselves with Him.

Paul said:

Colossians 3:16 — “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

And Romans says:

Romans 5:5 — “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

And Jude says:

Jude 20 — “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost.”

So if you want a strong heart—and you can have one:

- **Put the Word in it.** Let Scripture feed what your soul is hungry for.
- **Pray in the Spirit.** Let the Holy Ghost build you from the inside out.
- **Worship until the heart softens again.** There is something about genuine worship that restores tenderness.

Cross References — Step 3

Colossians 3:16 — *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...*

The word “dwell” is “enoikeo”—to make a home. Not a visit. Not a weekend stay. The Word moves in and takes up residence.

Romans 5:5 — *...the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost...*

Paul says hope doesn't disappoint because the Spirit fills us with the experiential love of God. This is internal, supernatural, and personal.

Jude 20 — *...building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost.*

Jude writes to a church surrounded by false teachers. His antidote isn't argument—it's Spirit-filled prayer that builds from within.

Psalms 119:11 — *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

The word “hid” is “tsaphan”—to treasure up, to store securely. It's heart-level storage for moments of need.

4) ILLUSTRATIONS THAT LOCK IT IN

Illustration 1: The City Well

In ancient times, if an enemy poisoned a city's well, the whole city suffered—because the well was the source. The enemy doesn't have to destroy your platform. He doesn't have to touch your church attendance. He doesn't have to come for your title.

If the well gets poisoned, everything downstream suffers. But if the well stays clean, everything downstream thrives. Your heart is the well. Guard it—and watch your whole life flourish.

Historical Note

During the Siege of Caffa in 1346, the Mongol army catapulted plague-infected corpses over the city walls to contaminate the water supply and the population inside. The disease spread not by sword, but by source. Spiritual warfare works the same way—the enemy doesn't always come with an obvious attack. Sometimes he just tries to poison the well quietly. That's why vigilance matters.

Illustration 2: Nehemiah's Watchmen

In **Nehemiah 4**, they rebuilt the wall, but they also posted watchmen. The building was a project. The watching was a **lifestyle**.

Deliverance is a moment. But guarding is a daily grace.

Some of us have experienced incredible breakthroughs—God set us free from things that held us for years. And that was real. That was God. But freedom requires maintenance. Not because God's work was incomplete, but because we live in a world that constantly tries to refill what God has emptied.

Stewardship says: "I'm free, and by the grace of God, I'm staying free."

5) CLOSE: HEART CHECK + ALTAR CALL MOMENT

[Slow down. Let it get quiet. Tender tone.]

Now tonight, we don't end with information. We end with an **invitation**.

Because Proverbs 4:23 didn't say, "Keep your heart when you feel like it." It said, "**Keep it with all diligence.**" And diligence is a word that carries love in it—it's the care of someone who values what they've been given.

So I want to ask you some real questions—and I'm asking them because I love this church too much to preach around the truth:

- What is sitting in your heart right now that has no business being there?
- Is there an offense you've been nursing when you should have been releasing it?
- Is there a sin you've been renaming to make it easier to live with?
- Is there a distance from God you've been blaming on your schedule when it's really about your choices?
- Is there something the Holy Ghost has been dealing with you about—and you keep putting it off?

And Jesus said:

Matthew 5:8

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

Some of us can't see God clearly anymore—not because He moved, but because we've let the heart get so crowded with other things that there's no room for His voice. And tonight, He's not asking for a corner of your heart. He's asking for **all of it**.

God is here tonight to do heart work.

[Invitation. Open arms. Warm voice.]

If you need God to **cleanse** your heart—He's willing. But you have to bring it to Him.

If you need God to **soften** your heart—He can do it tonight. But you have to stop resisting.

If you need God to **heal** your heart—He's near. But healing requires honesty.

If you need God to **restore** your heart—He's faithful. But restoration starts with surrender.

I want you to step out and come.

[Pause.]

**This is not shame—but it is serious. This is not condemnation—but it is a call to action.
God is moving tonight. The question is: will you move with Him?**

[Pray.]

Father, in the name of Jesus:

Create in us clean hearts.

Renew a right spirit within us.

Where there is hardness, bring tenderness.

Where there are roots of bitterness, bring Your healing.

Wash us from hidden sin. We're not hiding anymore.

Restore joy. Restore hunger. Restore holy fire.

Let love return. Let purity return. Let reverence return.

We give You access to every room in our hearts tonight.

In Jesus' name.

And everybody said: Amen.

RECOMMENDED STUDY RESOURCES

Primary Resources

| Resource | Publisher / Author | Best Used For |
|---|-------------------------------|--|
| Word Aflame Apostolic Study Bible (KJV) | Pentecostal Publishing House | Doctrinal commentary, Apostolic study notes |
| Raymond Woodward Bible Studies | raymondwoodward.com | Sermon series outlines, topical studies |
| Research & Resources (Woodward) | raymondwoodward.com/resources | C.R.A.F.T. method, sermon planning |
| Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance | James Strong | Hebrew/Greek word studies from the KJV |
| Blue Letter Bible | blueletterbible.org | Online word studies, interlinear, cross-references |

Apostolic Doctrinal References

- **The Oneness of God** — David K. Bernard
- **The New Birth** — David K. Bernard
- **In Search of Holiness** — David K. Bernard
- **Because We Are His** — Raymond Woodward
- **Distinctive Doctrines of the Apostolic Church** — UPCI scholars
- **Vine’s Expository Dictionary of NT Words** — W.E. Vine

Woodward Sermon Series of Note

These series from raymondwoodward.com provide excellent models for multi-week teaching:

- **All In Him: Colossians** — Christology and the preeminence of Jesus
- **Become What You Believe: Ephesians** — identity and walk in Christ
- **Dead Man Living: Philippians** — joy through suffering
- **Free: Galatians** — law vs. grace, freedom in the Spirit
- **Because We Are His** — practical holiness
- **Effectual Fervent Prayer** — powerful prayer life
- **Foundation Stones** — core doctrines for growing believers

Apostolic Study Bible Note

The Word Aflame Apostolic Study Bible (KJV) provides book introductions, outlines, and study notes written exclusively by Oneness Pentecostal scholars including David K. Bernard, Daniel Segraves, and David Norris. Use it as your primary commentary resource to ensure Apostolic doctrinal alignment.

FINAL WORD

Preach for transformation, not just information. When you stand to preach, you are standing between God and a room full of people who are hoping—some of them desperately—that God has a word for them today. Your job is to take the unchanging Word of God, bridge it to their changing world, and deliver it in a way that makes them say: “I can hold on one more week. I can believe God for one more day.”

“Hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” — Romans 5:5 (KJV)