

# Guard Your Hearts And Your Minds

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[ 0 : 00 ] Okay, I'd like us to turn together again to Philippians chapter four. We're going to read verses four to seven again. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice.

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. Let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. These are very rich and famous verses.

They speak of joy, anxiety, peace, prayer, thanksgiving. And that's just a few sentences. There's loads in these verses before us. And what I want us to focus on tonight are these words at the very end of verse seven.

And we're going to take them as our title, guarding our hearts and our minds. And as we think about this, we're just going to think about three things.

[ 0 : 56 ] We're going to be thinking about the meaning of hearts and minds in that statement. We're going to be thinking about the threats to our hearts and minds. And we're going to be thinking about the guard for our hearts and minds that Paul highlights.

So three very simple points and we'll whiz through them together just now. So first of all, thinking just a little bit about what Paul means in these words.

That's always the first task we have when we're reading the Bible. We need to ensure that we understand what's being said and we want to make sure we know what Paul is talking about. And so whenever you're reading the Bible, the first step you need to take is to ask, what does it say? And so when you're looking at a verse, a passage, you want to think about what it says and to make sure that you understand that. We call that process exegesis. It's where you're just digging into a passage and making sure you know what is being said there.

So when Paul speaks about our hearts and our minds, we think, OK, well, those are familiar words. They seem pretty easy enough to understand. But we also have to ask, not just what does it say, but we also have to ask, what does it mean?

[ 2 : 08 ] In other words, what is Paul intending by his use of these words? And we call that process hermeneutics, where we're trying to figure out what's being meant in the statement that's being made.

So you've always got these two things to do, you have to think, OK, what does it say? What does it mean? And these are key parts of the task of interpreting the Bible. And in this same question arises here, because when Paul talks about hearts and minds, we have to ask the question, is he talking about something physical?

Or is he talking about something spiritual? So is he talking about your physical heart and your physical brain? Or is he talking about a non-physical reality? Is he talking about something in the spiritual sense, but not in the physical sense?

And you might say, well, it's obviously the second one. This is not talking about protecting your cardiovascular system, and it's not talking about protecting your neurological capacities.

It's talking about something to do with our character and our inward being. That's correct. How do you know? How do you know that's what it means?

[ 3 : 17 ] And I wanted to just highlight this briefly because this is a good opportunity for us to think about how we read and handle the Bible. It's always good for us to take opportunities from time to time to think about how we read the Bible, because we can very quickly jump to an interpretive conclusion, and very often they will be correct.

But if we do that just in our own instincts, then there's no guarantee that we'll always be correct. And sometimes people's instinctive interpretation of the Bible can actually be wrong. Sometimes it can be very wrong. And to avoid that, it's always good from time to time to take an opportunity to try and develop and hone the skills that we need to read and interpret the Bible appropriately.

And it's not really too difficult to do that. You just have to remember two incredibly important things. There's two tools you need to have in mind when you're reading the Bible. You need to think about the specific context of the passage, and you need to think about the big story of the Bible. In other words, you should always be thinking, what does the rest of this passage say? And be thinking about what does the rest of the Bible say? If you... I always use engineering or DIY illustrations.

[ 4 : 29 ] That's really where my mind goes. If you think about the wiring of your house, if you want to plug in your hairdryer, that needs to fit with the wiring in your bedroom. So that wiring has to be connected to a ring main, has to be connected to a fuse box.

It has to have the type of plug that matches the type of plug that's on your hairdryer. So your hairdryer has to fit with what's in the room. But what's in the room needs to fit with the national grid. It needs to be compatible with a 240 volt AC supply that is distributed across our nation. So when you read the Bible, you need to understand how each room is wired. You need to think about the context of each passage. And you also need to think about how it connects with the national grid of the Bible's big story.

So in terms of hearts and minds, if you think about the rest of the Bible, again and again and again, the Bible uses that language to speak about our spiritual inner being, our emotions, our desires, our choices, our affections, our decisions.

Very rarely is the Bible using the words heart and mind to speak about the blood pumping in your chest or about the electrical signal transmitted in your brain.

[ 5 : 38 ] And the context here confirms that that's how Paul is using these words. He's talking about joy, about anxiety, about reasonableness, about thanksgiving.

They're all spiritual concepts because they are real but they're not physical. They are non-physical realities. They're spiritual concepts. So to maybe reinforce the point, if by comparison verse 4 said this, stay fit before the Lord always. Again, I will say stay fit.

Let your healthy lifestyle be known to everyone. The Lord's at hand, don't be unhealthy about anything but in everything with exercise and a balanced diet with thanksgiving, let your fitness routine be made known to God.

If that's what it said and then it spoke about hearts and minds, you'd be like, oh, it means this thing, my physical heart and my brain. So the context tells you, would have told you that it was physical then.

Of course, that's not the language Paul uses. It's all spiritual language. And so because of the way the Bible uses the heart and the language of heart and mind and because of the context of what's been said here, we know that Paul is talking about something spiritual.

[ 6 : 44 ] He's talking about your inner being. And you might think, Thomas, that was obvious. That's what I thought all along. And you're right, it was obvious and I'm sure that all of you do that automatically.

That when you read that, you knew, sit away. You didn't think of your circulatory system. You thought about something spiritual or inward being.

Automatically, you'd have thought of that. It was obvious. But the key point is that it's not always obvious. And when it's not, we need to make sure we have the skills to look at the context of the passage and to remember the overall message of the Bible to make sure that our interpretation is guided by these principles.

So, hearts and minds is talking about our inner being. But there's another interpretive question to ask. Is that talking about two different things? When Paul talks about your heart and your mind, is that two different things?

Or is it two words for the same thing? Well, I think it's probably best to say that these are two distinct aspects of the same thing.

[ 7 : 50 ] So, when the Bible speaks about our hearts, it's generally referring to our emotions, our desires and our affections. And all of these things that sit at the very core of who we are.

And so, Paul will speak about the feelings of his heart in Philippians 1.7, just at the start of the letter, in Romans he speaks about the desires of his heart.

And then the mind is often used in scripture to refer to our thinking, our understanding. And for that reason, the New Testament can speak about how our mind can be distorted and deceived.

We can be led astray in our thinking. So, you've got these two aspects, our heart and our mind. They are two complementary aspects of the same thing.

Paul here is speaking about our whole inner being, our emotions, our desires, our affections, our reasoning, our decisions. And at a very, very broad level, all of this is reminding us that the Gospel is concerned with our whole being, our character, our attitudes, our judgments.

[ 9 : 02 ] All of these should be shaped by the Gospel. And any idea that our faith sits in kind of a corner of our lives, that maybe, well, my faith is kind of down here in my heart, but it doesn't need to affect my thinking, or my faith sits here on a Sunday, and it doesn't have to affect the rest of my week, that's a million miles from what the New Testament teaches.

Everything is to be shaped by the Gospel, including all of your emotional responses and all of your intellectual convictions, they are to be shaped by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And the key point that this passage is teaching is that all of these things need to be guarded. Paul is saying to guard our hearts and minds, and the reason they need to be guarded is because they face threats.

Our hearts and our minds are exposed to threats. That's what's assumed by the language of guarding. It's the word that Paul uses there to guard your hearts and minds, it's the word that means to keep watch over something, it conveys the idea of protection.

And that protection is needed because our hearts and our minds are exposed to danger. We are constantly facing threats that can harm us. And these threats to our spiritual wellbeing are highlighting the reality of spiritual opposition, of the fact that we face conflict in our lives.

[ 10 : 26 ] We face spiritual conflict, both as unbelievers and as believers. And that's one of the things that, this is one of the ways in which we see that the Bible makes so much more sense of life than a kind of modern naturalistic worldview.

If you have a kind of worldview that has no room for God and that denies spiritual reality, in that worldview, the only threats you face are physical. And that's the reality, we need to protect ourselves from the physical threats that can compromise our survival.

But you don't need to think about things long to know that, yes, physical threats are real, but so much of the pain that we experience in life comes from non-physical threats.

So you might be in school today, and you might, I don't know if a science book would say this, but you might have a science classroom where people would say, spiritual stuff doesn't really exist. I'm sure there's maybe people in Scotland who love to experience that.

You might be in your class and they'll say, you know, spiritual stuff, we don't believe that anymore, it doesn't exist. But then you go into the playground and you get bullied, or you get rejected by the girl or the boy that you like, or you make a choice that you bitterly regret, and you instantly know that all of that pain is much more than just hormones in your body or signals in your brain.

[ 11 : 54 ] Spiritual danger, spiritual pain, spiritual threats are real, and they all have their root in the fact that sin and the spiritual forces of evil are real.

And those threats to our hearts and our minds can come in loads of different ways. There's three very clear examples in this passage. In verses one to three, we read of conflict between two women in the congregation in Philippi.

Yodia and Sinchote have, Sintihl have fallen out. And that's the kind of conflict that can happen very, very easily. It's happened thousands upon thousands of times in the 2000 years since Paul wrote this letter.

And when it does, it can cause so much damage to our hearts and our minds. When it happens to us, when we fall out with people, we feel hurt, we feel offended, we feel let down.

Sometimes we can escalate things because we use that as an excuse to be harsh or unforgiving or cold. And other people can get caught up in it. You see that in this set of polls appealing to the church to say, look, please, through companion healthies women, let's see if we can find a solution.

[ 13 : 02 ] And all of it damages our hearts and minds. We're bruised by the harshness of other people. And yet at the same time, we can so easily become hasty in our judgments and we can become hurtful in our behavior.

I heard someone say recently, I can't remember where I heard someone say this, but it really stuck with me. They said that a bruised heart is very fertile soil. A bruised heart is very fertile soil. And so whatever you plant in it at that moment is gonna grow. So if you get bruised and you plant forgiveness and grace at that moment, then that will grow.

But if you get bruised and you plant bitterness and resentment, then that will grow. I thought that was so true. So you got conflict and the threat that that causes.

Verses eight to nine, you got these beautiful words describing everything that's positive. All these positive aspects of life that we should focus on. But of course, as we read those, all of that's contrasting with the constant temptation that we have to be negative and to be complaining.

[14:22] And I don't think it's assuming too much to think that, what Paul is commanding here is because there was, very likely there was a tendency to be very negative amongst the congregation there.

And so often we face that temptation to be negative and to complain. So instead of following what Paul writes here, we can stew over half truths and we can be attracted to dishonorable things, gossip and scandal.

We can grumble over a sense of injustice. We can indulge in all sorts of things that are not pure and that are not lovely. And that can be so damaging to our hearts and our minds, breeds resentment, bitterness, anger, suspicion, paranoia.

It all happened so easily. And as I said, I think the reason these commands are there is because the opposite tendency was clearly a risk for them. And for us, maybe that's what laid the root of the fallout between Yod and Sintih.

They were two people who kept thinking the worst of each other. And it's so easy to do that. I've done that so many times, but we should always ask the question, how many people reach the end of their lives and think, you know what, I wish I had been more negative.

[15:40] Nobody thinks that at all. Yet it's so easy to fall into that trap as we go through day to day life just now. Then in verses 10 to 13, and really through the rest of the chapter, we have the whole question of contentment, what we're content with or not content with, as the case may be.

One of the reasons Paul is writing to the Philippians is because they sent him a gift and he's writing to thank them. But as he does, so he wants to emphasize that his material circumstances do not govern his contentment.

And we would agree with that. We would say, you know, oh yeah, my material circumstances, that's not where my contentment lies. And yet so often, our hearts and our minds are bruised by our material circumstances.

We feel like we aren't earning enough. We feel like our house isn't the one that we dreamed of. We feel like the car's not as nice as the neighbor's. Or maybe we just feel like we don't have the right phone or the right shoes or the right clothes. And all of that can sting our hearts.

It can torment our minds. And so many people struggle with this. And I think it's also true today that in the UK, we have more than we've ever had before.

[16:48] And yet so many people struggle with contentment. So in these verses, we've got conflict. We've got, there's the complaint and negativity that we can be drawn to.

There's the whole question of contentment. And these are threats to our hearts and minds. And really, these are the things that can really hurt us.

And maybe that's what you're experiencing right now. Maybe you're in the midst of a conflict with school friends, with colleagues, with neighbors, with family.

Maybe you're in a spiral of negativity. You can just, all you can see is what's wrong with your life.

And all you can see is what's wrong with other people, with church, maybe even with yourself.

And maybe you're struggling with contentment. So much that you wish was different about your life. There's so much about everyone else's life that looks better.

[17:44] And if you feel like that, I am not here to make you feel guilty. The Bible is not saying stop it. And God has not brought you here to give you a round.

First of all, the reason the Bible speaks about guarding our hearts and minds is because God knows that these things are threats. God knows that all of these things can leave deep, deep wounds in our hearts.

He knows that they can bring relentless tension to our minds. And in the midst of that, God wants to comfort you. He wants to heal you and he wants to restore you.

Part of the beauty of the Gospel is that Jesus brings healing for the deepest sky. And that's something that's so, so important to remember with all the bruises and hurts and frustrations in our hearts, with all the tension and confusion and frustration in our minds, we can bring it all to Jesus and he will heal us.

That healing may not come instantly, just like physical healing doesn't come instantly, inward healing doesn't come instantly, but Jesus will heal us. And so we can come to him with all of these wounds, bruises and scars.

[ 18 : 59 ] But another beautiful aspect of the Gospel is that listening to God isn't just restorative. It's also preventative. In other words, God doesn't just want to heal your heart and mind, he wants to protect your heart and mind.

And he does that through a beautiful guard. And the guard is identified for us in verse seven. The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

And that comes from bringing everything to the Lord in prayer, you see that in verse six, reminding us that all the anxieties that come in life should simply become our prayer list.

The things that we worry about should be the things that we pray about, and we can leave all of these requests with God. And we do that in our day-to-day relationship with him, where we talk to him about everything and where we keep listening to him speak through his word as we read it, both in our own daily readings and in hearing it preached.

In all of these ways, we leave stuff with God and the peace of God will guard our hearts. That peace surpasses all understanding.

[ 20 : 15 ] And I think that's such a beautiful phrase. And it tells us two things, it tells us lots of things, but two very important things I want to highlight. First, it tells us that God's peace is beyond what we can describe.

God's peace is beyond what we can describe. And I think many of you will know what that is talking about, because for many Christians, there will be certain points in your life when you have sensed God's peace in a very powerful way.

And when that happens, it is something that cannot be described. It doesn't happen often, and it doesn't necessarily happen to everybody, but it is an indescribable peace that nothing can match.

I don't know if I've ever told you this, but I'm just going to tell it to you. Almost 10 years ago, I graduated from ETS, I was licensed to preach, and I was called to Carloway.

And when you're called as a student, you can come and accept the call on the night that the call is signed, and many of you were there the night that that happened. What I don't know if I've ever told you was that I was absolutely terrified coming.

[ 21 : 30 ] Not because of you, because I didn't know if I was doing the right thing. Those of you who know me well know that I'm a pretty terrible decision maker, and I know that some people have always had really clear guidance from God with big decisions that they've made.

I've never really experienced that in my life, and I was driving here, phoning you now saying, I don't know if I can do this. I don't know if I should do this.

And it was really hard. But we did believe it was the right thing to do. I accepted the call.

As I drove home, and I remember it right now, I stopped at Dalbeck, phoned my wife, and I said, I have such an incredible sense of peace.

I can't describe it. It's a peace that passes all understanding. And that's one of a few incredibly precious moments in my life when I've had that amazing sense of peace from God, and I'm sure many of you know what that feels like.

[ 22 : 42 ] And so God's peace is beyond what we can describe. It also passes all understanding, reminding us that we can have that peace even when we can't understand everything that's going on.

We don't need to have all the answers in order to have peace. The thing I want to highlight here, though, most of all, is that when we think about the imagery that Paul is using here, what he describes, the peace of God guarding your hearts and minds, it is so incredibly important that our understanding of this is the right way round.

And the reason I say that is because it is so easy to think that peace is the wrong way round. Often when we are dealing with things like conflict, or complaint, or contentment, we think that peace will be the outcome of all the activities that we kind of indulge in in this way.

So in other words, if you imagine that all of these things we're going to talk about are roads, we easily think that peace lies at the end of the road.

Peace will lie at the end of the road. It's the outcome. It's the destination. So you take the conflict road. Someone hurts us, annoys us, lets us down. We think maintaining conflict is going to give me peace.

[ 23 : 58 ] If I draw a line, if I say that's it, I am not going to talk to them. I'm not going to forgive them. I am not going to let this go.

I am going down this road, and we think it's going to give me peace. And we keep on going down that road, because we think that peace lies at the end of it. Same with the complaint road.

Things are going wrong, and we get frustrated, and we think that negativity is going to nourish us. Stewing is going to soothe us. Criticizing is going to comfort us.

And so we dwell again and again on the worst aspects of people and of situations, and we keep driving that down that road because we think it's going to lead to peace. And the same is true on the road that's seeking contentment in our material circumstances.

Just a bit more money, just a slightly bigger house, just a newer phone, bigger TV, nicer clothes. If I just get that, if I just get a little bit more, I'll have peace.

[ 25 : 01 ] If you're anything like me, I have lost count of the number of times I have bought the last thing I'll ever need. And we keep going down that road. We keep going down that road because we think that it will lead to peace.

And all of that is the wrong way round. Because none of these roads lead to peace. They all lead to misery. And the imagery that Paul uses here is the other way round, completely.

Because as Paul speaks of peace, guarding our hearts and minds, he is highlighting the fact that God's peace has a protective and a preventative role. It is a guard over our hearts.

In other words, God's peace is never, ever the destination at the end of the road of conflict or of negativity or of gaining more material possessions.

God's peace is never the thing that lies at the end of those roads. God's peace is the thing that stops you from going down those roads in the first place.

[ 26 : 08 ] And that's the key point. The peace that we have with God through the finished work of Jesus, the peace we enjoy from God as we experience His presence in our lives through the Holy Spirit, means that we don't need to go down those roads.

We don't need to win every argument and be proved right. We don't need to dwell on the negative stuff that we see in ourselves or in others. And we don't need to look for security and satisfaction in yet more stuff.

Instead, we enjoy the beauty and wonder of knowing our Heavenly Father, of experiencing salvation and healing and reconciliation through His Son, and experiencing the presence and renewal of God the Holy Spirit in our lives every day.

And as we do those things, as we think about that, as we dwell on that, what happens? Our hearts feel safe.

And our minds are settled. And it's just a wonderful reminder of how good God is, of how amazing the gospel is, and of how in God's word we find absolutely everything that we need.

[ 27 : 21 ] Everything we need for the week ahead, everything we need for the rest of our lives. Our hearts and minds face many threats, but God has given us a guard.

It's His amazing peace, the peace that comes from knowing Him through His Son, our Lord Jesus. Amen.