

Finding God's Peace in the Face of Spiritual Attack

Welcome to **Week 5** of a **Stress Less Life**. We are on a journey to discover true freedom and peace so that the tyranny of stress doesn't dominate our daily life, robbing us of the joy that God intends for us to have. Through this series we are learning how to abide in Christ and to change the way we view our lives so that we can claim the promise God has for us in His word. Our theme verse for this series is

John 10:10 (NIV) 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have LIFE, and have it to the FULL.

If this is God's promise to us **ARE YOU THRIVING or are you just SURVIVING?** Because if we are not THRIVING we are living below what God has promised us and we need to allow Him to make some changes in our lives as we engage in a serious pursuit of trying to eliminate the things that are keeping us from doing so.

Over the last 3 weeks we have looked at how we can find peace in our SCHEDULE, our BUDGET and in our RELATIONSHIPS. Today, we want to deal with how to find peace when we are under SPIRITUAL ATTACK. Up to this point we have been dealing with certain aspects of our lives that are somewhat tangible in nature. When I say "budget" you know that refers to money and how you spend it. When I say "schedule" you know I am referring to your calendar and all of the events and things that make up your day to day life. And when I say "relationships" you think about the people in your life that you interact with on a regular basis. But when I say "SPIRITUAL ATTACK" or that in order to have peace in your life "you need to guard your heart from such spiritual attacks," that can be a little more difficult to define. In fact, I wonder how much of the stress that is robbing us of God's peace in our lives is simply the result of the enemy attacking us spiritually and because we haven't properly prepared our hearts we have become extremely vulnerable to having our peace taken away from us.

I want to propose to you that one of the ways we can prevent or reduce stress in our lives is to simply be more intentional about guarding our heart from the temptations that Satan wants to bring into our lives. Listen to what **Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)** says, **Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.** In fact, I really like how the NLT puts it, **Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.** In other words, so much of our life is dictated by the condition of our heart. If we fail to properly guard our hearts from the enemy's attacks, we in essence open up ourselves to a stress ridden life. We need to understand that the enemy will do anything he can to keep us from laying hold of the peace that Jesus so longs for us to have. Now, when Proverbs 4:23 refers to the heart it is not referring to the organ that pumps blood to all of our body but instead it is a reference to our mind, our conscious self, the seat of our thoughts, our will and our emotions. The heart of who we really are on the inside. Proverbs 4 is encouraging us to guard our heart in order to prevent it from being influenced by things that are designed to cause us stress.

So what are these things that we are guarding our heart against and how do we go about doing that? To help us with these questions we are going to take a look at **Proverbs 4:23-27 (NIV)** but before we do we need to understand the serious nature of our current situation.

First of all, **we have a real enemy, and his name is Satan.** In a recent survey conducted by Barna 56% of people agreed with the statement that **“Satan is not merely a symbol of evil but is a real spiritual being and influences human lives.”** The good news is that number is up from a survey conducted 10 years prior. The bad part is that there are still 44% of Americans who disagree with that statement. (That’s almost half the country that doesn’t understand that they are under spiritual attack.) What’s even more discouraging is that not everyone who believes Satan exists, sees him as an enemy. Many see him as a force to be used or as someone who is not as bad as the Bible makes him out to be. Satan is real and he is not your friend!

The Bible tells us that Satan is on the prowl and looking to destroy lives. **1 Peter 5:8 (NIV) Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.** Satan is looking for any and every opportunity to disrupt what God has promised us in Christ Jesus. He hates us because we remind him of God and he is doing everything he can to destroy our lives so that we will not reflect God’s glory.

Secondly, **he is a liar.** He is the exact opposite of all that God is. God is true and faithful. While Satan loves to deceive and lie to us. **John 8:44 (NIV) You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires.** This is not how you want Jesus to identify you. Here Jesus is speaking to the religious leaders who had failed to see Jesus as the promised Messiah. He goes on to say this about Satan. **He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.** What Satan offers us is an alternative to Jesus and if Jesus is the truth then everything Satan is trying to lead us toward is founded on a lie and is therefore a counterfeit to the true peace God desires for us to have.

Lastly, **he is defeated.** There is no need to fear him because His days are numbered and he only has influence over the one who allows him to have influence. **Revelation 20:10 (NIV) 10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.** He has power but nothing compared to what God has, not even close! In fact he has been disarmed by Jesus **Colossians 2:15 (NIV) "15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."** We know Satan is defeated because Jesus defeated him and all his spiritual powers through His crucifixion and resurrection.

With that out of the way let’s dive into **Proverbs 4** and take a look at where we are vulnerable to spiritual attack and what we are encouraged to do if we want to establish God’s peace in our lives in the midst of such spiritual attacks. The context here is that of a father’s instruction to his son. We believe that this is Solomon offering up wisdom that will serve his son well as he

transitions to adulthood. These are most likely lessons he learned the hard way by making these mistakes himself. Each of the areas highlight where we are all prone to temptation and spiritual attack. He is encouraging his son to prepare himself for these areas of vulnerability. Notice what he says to him first.

Proverbs 4:23-24 (NIV) 23 Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. **24** Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. First, I want you to notice we are to **WATCH what we SAY**. Nothing has added more stress in my life like the things that have come out of my mouth. Whether it was saying something when frustrated, saying something before I had all the facts, or just being quick to offer my two cents worth before really choosing my words wisely or considering the feelings of others. Our tongue is a huge temptation and a place where Satan loves to attack us spiritually if we are not careful. Let me just say that our mouths can get us in a lot of trouble. Btw, our mouth isn't its own entity. We control it. We give it permission to speak, we choose the words it uses, and when it should or shouldn't speak. But Jesus tells us if we want to be able to control our tongue we have to do something about our heart because the tongue is simply an overflow valve of what is going on in our heart.

Matthew 12:33-35 (NIV) "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. **34** You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. **35** A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. If we are going to watch what we say then we have to be mindful of what we are allowing our heart to consume because out of the abundance of our heart the mouth will speak.

Notice verse 25. **Proverbs 4:25 (NIV)** Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Secondly, we are to **WATCH where we LOOK**. Our eyes influence our hearts. We are swept away by things that look appealing and they can grab hold of us because of the lust of our flesh. Material things, pornography, or anything that can lure our hearts away from God and appeal to our flesh. That's why John says what he does in **1 John 2:15-16 (NIV) 15** Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. **16** For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world." Satan tempts us through our eyes because he knows these things can have a huge influence on our lives and when we do not fix our gaze on Jesus and when we allow our eyes to wander it only leads to difficulty and stress. Jesus warns us of the influence our eyes can have on us when he says this. **Matthew 6:22-23(NIV) 22** "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. **23** But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

Notice the last two verses of our passage here in Proverbs 4. **Proverbs 4:26-27 (NIV) 26** Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. **27** Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil. Lastly, we must be careful and **WATCH where we STEP!!** We need to stay away from places that are not healthy or wholesome for our lives.

There are just some places we do not need to go. They are paths that lead to heartache and stress. But again, just like our tongue and our eyes, our feet go where we tell them to go. We don't end up in the ditch or off the good path by accident. We intentionally left the path to pursue another direction. We must carefully consider the path for our feet and make sure that the path is one God would have us to walk on. Otherwise we will not find God's peace. Listen to the warning God gives us through Isaiah for those who do not want to walk on His path but who want to pursue their own way.

Isaiah 59:8 (NIV) The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks along them will know peace. Satan wants us to take any path but God's path so he can pluck us out of the peace God promises us.

Compare that with God's promise in Proverbs 3. **Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)** Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. If we will trust Him and walk on the path He has set for us, life and life abundant awaits. He will take away our stress and allow us to walk in His peace. Now let me be clear, the temptation to stress may not go away. That is part of the spiritual attack Satan places on our lives. He wants to lure us away but the stress that overwhelms us and robs us of life will never consume us or even be allowed to touch us if we trust our way to God's path. Do you believe this promise? Are you walking in that promise?

So just to recap. We are encouraged to watch our MOUTH and what we SAY. We are encouraged to watch our EYES and where we LOOK. And lastly we are encouraged to watch our FEET and where we STEP. But notice the one thing that impacts them ALL. **IT IS THE HEART!!!** Our mouth says what the heart leads it to say, The eyes look where the heart directs it to look. The feet step where the heart informs it to step. That's why verse 23 says, **Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.**

The stress we may be experiencing in our life right now may never subside or go away if our heart is not healthy and if we are not intentional about guarding our heart from the spiritual attacks that will come from our enemy. The bottom line is we may be sabotaging our own peace simply because we don't take seriously the command by God to simply guard our heart or even allow God to heal or restore our heart. **What do I need to do to achieve a healthy heart?**

Well before we can answer that question let's first look at the reality of the natural condition of our heart.

Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV) The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? The answer, GOD understands our heart because He created us.

Notice God's remedy for our condition!

2 Chronicles 7:14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

1 John 1:9 (NIV) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

How is your heart currently?

Healthy Heart Check

- 1) **Have you given your heart to Jesus?** (Are you broken over your sin and are in need of forgiveness?)
- 2) **Are you living by FAITH?** (You know God's word and trying to live out especially when it is inconvenient?)
- 3) **Are you allowing the Holy Spirit to guide your mouth, your eyes, and your feet?** (Is there anything in your life that you are doing right now you would do differently if Jesus was standing right next to you in the flesh? - Because He is here right now!)
- 4) **Have there been some compromises** you have made recently with (your speech, your eyes, and your feet) that have stolen a little of your passion or zeal for Jesus?

Would you do business with God right here in this moment?

Invitation:

- **If you need Jesus would you receive Him?**
- **Where have you stopped living by faith? Would you confess it and seek forgiveness and cleansing**
- **Are you guarding your heart?**
- **Have you made some compromises? What are they? And will you allow God to shore them up?**