

The Heart of the Problem

A 5-Day Devotional Guide

Introduction

What forms in your heart flows into your life. This week's talk explored how the condition of our hearts shapes the words we speak and the way we treat the people in front of us — whether we bless or curse, build up or tear down. Over the next five days, this devotional will help you slow down, look honestly at your own heart, and invite God to change what flows from it. Each day includes a short passage of Scripture, a reflection connected to the talk, questions to help you apply it, and a closing prayer.

Before you begin Day 1, you will find a Prayer of Extension below: a simple version of the ancient Prayer of Examen. Try it at the end of each day this week. It will help you notice where blessing and cursing showed up in your day and invite God to keep reshaping your heart.

Prayer of Extension: The Examen

Use this simple prayer practice at the end of each day this week. It will take about 5–10 minutes.

1. Stop and invite God.

Sit quietly for a moment. Pray: “God, thank you that you are here. Help me see my day the way you see it.”

2. Say thank you.

Walk back through your day and name two or three specific things you are grateful for — a conversation, a small joy, help in a hard moment, something beautiful you saw. Thank God for each one.

3. Notice where blessing and cursing showed up.

Ask: “Holy Spirit, show me my posture toward people today.” As you replay key interactions, ask: Where did I bless someone — where did my words, tone or actions help, build up, encourage or include? Where did I curse or hinder — where did I tear down, ignore, gossip, snap, stay cold, or quietly write someone off? Pay attention to how you felt in those moments; that often reveals what your heart was full of.

4. Confess and receive grace.

Where you see blessing, thank God and ask him to grow that in you. Where you see cursing, be honest: “Lord, that should not be. Forgive me for that moment. Change my heart there.” You are not beating yourself up; you are letting God heal what is underneath.

5. Ask for help for tomorrow.

Finish by praying: “Jesus, tomorrow, help me bless. Show me one person you want me to bless, and one way you want me to respond differently.” If someone from today comes to mind — someone you snapped at, ignored, or gossiped about — ask God what a better response could look like next time.

If you do this each evening this week, you will start to see patterns: where your heart tends to bless, where it tends to curse, and how God is already at work changing you. It is a simple way of

guarding your heart and letting Jesus reshape what flows from it.

Day 1: Praise and Cursing

Scripture

“With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.” — James 3:9–10

Thought for the Day

James, Jesus’ younger brother, wrote to ordinary followers of Jesus about the gap between what we say in worship and what we say about people the rest of the week. It is possible to sing words of praise on a Sunday and rip someone apart over coffee or at the dinner table by Sunday lunch. James does not soften this: he simply says, ‘this should not be’. The same mouth cannot consistently honour God and dishonour people made in his likeness. Our everyday words are meant to match our worship — not because we are trying harder, but because a heart shaped by God produces a mouth shaped by God.

Reflection

- Think of the last week. Where did praise and cursing come out of the same mouth — yours?
- Is there a person you find it easy to praise God in front of, but hard to bless in conversation?
- What would it look like this week to let your everyday words match your worship?

Prayer

Lord, forgive me for the times my words have not matched my worship. Thank you that you do not just want my praise on a Sunday — you want my whole life, including my words, to honour you and the people around me. Change what comes out of my mouth by changing what fills my heart. Amen.

Day 2: The Fruit Reveals the Root

Scripture

“A good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit... The good person out of the good stored up in their heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil stored up in their heart produces evil.” — Luke 6:43–45

Thought for the Day

Jesus uses a simple picture: you can tell what kind of tree you are looking at by the fruit it produces. It is the same with us. The good things we do do not make us good on the inside; they reveal the good already stored up in our hearts. In the same way, sharp words, impatience and a cold shoulder are not random slip-ups. They are fruit, showing us what is growing at the root. What forms in your heart flows into your life.

Reflection

- What has your ‘fruit’ this week revealed about the state of your heart?
- How does it change things to see your actions and reactions as fruit, not just isolated moments?
- If your heart is the root, what is it currently being fed by?

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for this honest picture of fruit and root. I do not want to just manage my behaviour on the outside; I want you to do a deep work in my heart. Show me what is really growing there, and help me trust you to change the root so the fruit can change too. Amen.

Day 3: Guard Your Heart

Scripture

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” — Proverbs 4:23

Thought for the Day

Just as we can take practical steps to keep our physical hearts healthy — watching what we eat, staying active, avoiding what harms us, and going for regular check-ups — the same is true spiritually. What we take in matters. Filling your heart with good things — time in the Bible, meditating on God’s goodness, worship, encouraging input — shapes what eventually flows out of you. Guarding your heart is not passive; it is a daily, deliberate choice about what you let in.

Reflection

- What are you currently ‘feeding’ your heart through what you watch, read, listen to, or dwell on?
- What is one good thing you could add this week to fill your heart — Scripture, worship or encouragement?
- Above all else, guard your heart. What does ‘above all else’ suggest about how seriously to take this?

Prayer

Father, above all else, I want to guard my heart the way your Word tells me to. Help me be intentional about what I take in this week. Fill me with what is good so that good can flow out of me into the lives of the people I meet. Amen.

Day 4: What You Practise and What You Avoid

Scripture

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” — Proverbs 4:23

Thought for the Day

Guarding your heart is not only about what you take in; it is also about how active you are in your faith and what you deliberately avoid. Practising faith means putting feet on it: being generous, patient, forgiving and kind, stepping out of your comfort zone. Avoiding things that corrode your soul — bitterness, cynicism, gossip and greed — is just as important as what you add. And regular ‘check-ups’, asking God and trusted people to show you what you cannot see in yourself, help you catch problems before they become patterns.

Reflection

- Where is God inviting you to actively practise your faith this week — through a specific act of kindness, generosity or forgiveness?
- Is there something you know you need to avoid because it quietly poisons your heart?
- Who is someone you trust enough to ask, ‘What do you see in me that I might be missing?’

Prayer

Lord, help me not just to know what is good for my heart, but to actually practise it — and to have the courage to avoid what damages it. Bring people into my life who will lovingly tell me the truth about what they see. Keep my heart healthy so that what flows from it blesses others. Amen.

Day 5: Let Blessing Overflow

Scripture

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” — Romans 12:21

Thought for the Day

This week we have looked at the heart of the problem: what forms in your heart flows into your life. We have thought about the gap between praising God and speaking destructively about people made in his image. We have been challenged to pay attention to our fruit, to guard what we take in, and to practise faith in the ordinary moments of life.

But this is not simply about avoiding the wrong words or trying to be nicer. Jesus invites us into something better: a life where goodness overcomes evil, where kindness interrupts irritation, and where blessing becomes our posture toward the person in front of us. That does not mean pretending hurtful things do not happen or ignoring difficult relationships. It means choosing, with God's help, not to let someone else's actions decide the state of your heart.

Every interaction gives us an opportunity. Will I move toward this person or away from them? Will I want what is best for them or just what is easiest for me? Will I build up, encourage and include, or will I hinder, dismiss and tear down? You may not be able to control every situation, but you can bring your heart to Jesus and choose one deliberate step to bless. This is how the good God is forming in you begins to overflow into the world around you.

Reflection

- Looking back over this week, what has God shown you about the condition of your heart?
- Where are you most tempted to let irritation, hurt, cynicism or indifference shape your posture toward others?
- Who is one person God may be inviting you to bless this week — through your words, your attention, forgiveness, encouragement or a practical act of kindness?
- What is one specific, deliberate step you will take to let goodness overcome evil in an ordinary interaction this week?

Prayer

Jesus, thank you that you do not leave me stuck with the heart I have. Thank you that you are at work in me, forming your goodness, truth, mercy and love. Forgive me for the times I have allowed irritation, hurt or selfishness to overflow into my words and actions. Help me not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good. Show me one person I can bless this week, and give me the courage to take that step. May what you are forming in my heart flow into my life and point others towards you. Amen.