



Part 2: “Guard Your Heart”

10/27/19

REVIEW: Last Sunday we began our Fresh Encounter Emphasis by overviewing what biblical revival and spiritual awakening are and looking at the pattern God’s uses for these.

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Definition of Revival and Spiritual Awakening

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God’s Pattern for Revival and Spiritual Awakening – Phases 1-3

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God’s Pattern for Revival and Spiritual Awakening – Phases 4-6

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God’s Pattern for Revival and Spiritual Awakening – Phase 7

(Slide)

Today’s Focus: “God’s Pattern for Revival and Spiritual Awakening – Phase 2

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When God made the human heart, He made a thing of beauty. Your heart is central to your physical health. You need your heart to pump oxygen-filled blood throughout your body on a moment-by-moment basis every day.

As you can see, your heart can pump about 80 pounds of blood every hour.

But the heart is also a filtration system. It removes carbon dioxide and other contaminants in your body. As goes your heart, so goes your health!

This year in America...

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Heart Disease in the United States

- About 610,000 people die of heart disease in the United States every year—that's 1 in every 4 deaths.
- Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women.

And that's why doctors will tell you to guard your heart by...

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- Not smoking or using tobacco. ...
- Exercising for about 30 minutes on most days of the week. ...
- Eating a **heart**-healthy diet. ...
- Maintaining a healthy weight. ...
- Getting enough quality sleep. ...
- Managing stress. ...
- Having regular check-ups

When you go to your doctor for a check-up, especially in regards to your heart, he or she is going to ask you about the signs of heart disease. There are symptoms that indicate that your heart is not doing well – shortness of breath, a tightness in your chest and others.

Fellowship, just as we must guard our physical heart because it is central to our physical health, it also imperative to guard our spiritual heart against spiritual heart disease that will cripple our Christian life and cause us to miss out on the plans God has for our life.

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“Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life.”

Proverbs 4:23

When you go to your doctor, a good doctor is going to:

- Ask you questions about your health – Is he being nosy? No, he needs to know what you’re experiencing so he can give a diagnosis, right?!
- When he makes that diagnosis, he’s going to give you information about what you have and what you can do about it
- He’s going to care about you and your health

Fellowship, if you’ll allow me the privilege today, I want to act as your spiritual doctor this morning. I want to ask you some questions – not because I’m nosy, but because I want to help you spiritually.

I want to tell you what the Bible says about guarding your heart, why you should do what Proverbs 4:23 says, what happens when you don’t, and how to guard your heart.

And I want to do this because I not only care for you and for your spiritual health, I love you and I have asked God to help us as a church family to be spiritually health in following Jesus Christ.

PRAY

The key to the Christian experience is the heart. Every follower of Jesus Christ has been offered by God the same opportunity of both a life and an eternity of enjoying fellowship with Him.

But it is the condition of your spiritual heart that determines the quality of that fellowship. As you heart goes, so goes your walk with Christ.

God created you to enjoy a loving relationship with Him. He has invited you to join Him in His global work of drawing spiritually lost people into fellowship with Him and worship of Him for eternity.

Our God is not some distant God who exists only in some unknowable place called heaven. No, He's a loving God who resides inside each and every person who has invited Him in through salvation.

And His expectations of us are not a mystery and they are not difficult to understand. He made them clear to His people in Old Testament times and because God never changes, those same expectations are what He expects of us today as well.

READ Deuteronomy 30:11-16

God asks every person who knows Him to do three things:

- (Slide) 1. Love Him (make Him #1 in your heart)
2. Walk in His ways (reflect God and His Word in the way you live)

3. Keep His commands (obey His Word, the Bible)

In spite of these clear expectations, we all have a tendency to drift away from these expectations in our every day lives. But here's the rub: to drift away from what God wants for us is to drift away from Him.

And to drift away from the Lord is to allow our heart to turn away from Him. This can be such a subtle thing that many times we don't even realize it's happening, and therein lies the danger.

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A drifting heart is the most dangerous threat to your walk with Christ.

Let me say that again: a drifting heart is the most dangerous threat to your walk with Christ. And I believe many of us think that we're immune to heart-drift, but let me make this clear to us all this morning...

If it can happen to people who personally witnessed the miraculous activities of God on their behalf like the Israelites did, it can happen to you, and to me!

Look again at Deuteronomy... Read 30:17-19

Did you see that? God says, "If your heart turns away..." That's heart-drift. God says, "If your heart drifts away from it's love for Him, then you're on your way to shifting your worship of Him to worshiping something or someone else, and that's worship-shift. Heart-drift leads to worship-shift.

And worship-shift leads to spiritual bankruptcy. So God says it again in verse 20... (READ).

There it is again, Love God, faithfully walk in His ways, and obey His commands. HE IS YOUR LIFE! Brothers and sisters in Christ, if Christ is your Savior, then HE IS YOUR LIFE. Not hobbies or sports or money or anything else, HE IS YOUR LIFE.

And notice again that it's love for God that's at the top of the list. A heart of love for God is the key to your walk with Christ.

When that drifts and slips, it's a slippery slope of spiritual decline that results. We have to guard our heart. If you don't guard your heart, it WILL drift and so will your walk with Christ.

e.g. Swimming at Virginia Beach in 5th Grade – The current slowly and imperceptively pulled me away from our group on the beach and I didn't even realize it til I was way down the beach and finally looked up and realized that I didn't recognize my surroundings.

One of the biblical terms God uses for a heart-drift, is the word "backslide". For example, Proverbs 14:14 says...

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"The backslidden in heart will be filled with his own ways..."

Proverbs 14:14

Do you see the connection there...to be backslidden is a description of one's heart? And when someone has a backslidden heart all they care about is their own ways, their own things, their own plans and desires.

In Isaiah God describes backslidden people this way...

"And he went on backsliding in the way of his heart."

Isaiah 57:17b

Again, we see here that to be spiritually backslidden is to have a heart that has drifted away from God. So here's what spiritual backsliding is...

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Backsliding:

to turn back; to have a heart that has drifted away from God and is turning back away from God; a departure from a close, devoted walk with God.

If your heart is turning back away from God, then it's returning to the way it was BEFORE you came to Christ for salvation. And the terms God uses for people who haven't or who refuse to come to God for salvation are: the fool, the wicked and the disobedient.

So, Fellowship, to possess a backslidden heart is to have a heart that has drifted away from the Lord and is turning back away from following the Lord just like the spiritual fool, the wicked and the disobedient who don't know God.

But worst of all, it's walking away from, it's going in the opposite direction from, the close walk with God that we begin with when we are saved. And when we do this, the worst part about this is that it crushes the heart of God.

Have you ever had your heart broken by someone? If you have, then you can testify that not only does it hurt, but it's something you would rather not have happen again.

And when we backslide away from the Lord, we walk away from the best thing, the best person, the best relationship we'll ever have: the loving fellowship with Jesus Christ who died on the cross and rose again for us so we could enjoy that loving fellowship forever.

In Jeremiah we get an understanding of how God feels when His people backslide away from their loving fellowship with Him...

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“The LORD said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: “Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. And I said, after she had done all these *things*, ‘Return to Me.’ But she did not return.

Then the LORD said to me, “Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah. Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say: ‘Return, backsliding Israel,’ says the LORD; ‘I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I *am* merciful,’ says the LORD; ‘I will not remain angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God, and have scattered your charms to alien deities under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice,’ says the LORD. ‘Return, O backsliding children,’” says the LORD.

Jeremiah 3

Do you see the passion with which God appeals to His wayward people to return to Him? And His feelings toward us today are the same. He doesn’t want us to be separated from Him by our own drifting hearts.

Spiritual backsliding is serious because it’s not simply a moral lapse or a rough spot in our Christian walk. God calls a backslidden heart betrayal. How sad is it that our Creator must beg us to return to Him in loving fellowship?

You would think we would be content to enjoy such a fulfilling fellowship with the Lord who loves us so much. But inevitably, we trend to drift away from Him.

So how do you know if your heart has drifted away from God? One sure way is by looking at your life and asking yourself, “Am I living in obedience to God and His Word”?

Now I’m not talking about when you mess up and you do something you know God doesn’t want you to do, and in response to His conviction you ask Him to forgive you and you make it right with Him and others if necessary.

I’m talking about a pattern of disobedience where there is an ongoing habit of doing things you know God doesn’t want you to do, and there is no repentance even when the Holy Spirit convicts you.

According to Jesus, an ongoing pattern of disobedience is a sure sign that your heart has drifted away from loving the Lord like you should.

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“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

John 14:15

“The one who has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me.”

John 14:21

e.g. Going to the doctor a couple of years ago – he used my pain to diagnose my problem: I had bursitis

My problem wasn’t my pain. My problem was that I had bursitis in my in leg and that caused the pain. So he gave me an injection and within a few hours I was back to normal.

In the same way, Jesus says when we disobey Him, that's not the problem. Disobedience isn't the problem. The problem is that our heart has drifted. We don't love God like we once did and like we should and the result is a tendency to disobey Him.

A lukewarm heart for God is going to result in a disobedient life to God. When our love drifts so does our obedience. Jesus is telling us that it's impossible to love Him and live in disobedience. And it's impossible to live a lifestyle of disobedience and love Him. It can't be done.

When a person loves Jesus, they can't help but want to live in obedience to His Word.

Let me ask you: Is there something God has asked you to do in the past and you obeyed Him, but now you're no longer willing to do that? I could give you tons of examples, but I'll just mention a couple:

- Maybe there was a time in your Christian walk when you were willing to forgive others because you felt indebted to God for His forgiveness toward you.
But now instead of forgiveness you're harboring resentment toward someone who has offended you? Or even bitterness toward someone, and you're not willing to forgive them?

- Maybe there was a time in your Christian life when you weren't afraid to talk to others about the Lord. You had a boldness because of your new faith.
But now instead of boldness, you hesitate or even outright disobey the Holy Spirit when He prompts you to talk to someone about the Lord.

- Maybe there was a time in your Christian life when you couldn't be kept from immersing yourself in the church family out of devotion to the Lord.

You served, you were part of groups that prayed together and studied God's Word together and fellowshiped together. In fact, if church leadership asked you to participate in something they felt important, you did it, no questions asked.

But over time, that willingness, and that desire to completely immerse yourself in the life of the church family has waned and to a great degree you watch God's activity in the church family as a spectator, not a participant.

You see, when Christ gives you a command in His Word, and you begin to argue with Him about whether or not or even if you should obey Him, you're demonstrating that your heart has shifted.

Are you demonstrating a heart shift this morning? I hope not, but if so, listen to what God wants to say to you through His Word...

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"I give you a new commandment: love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another."

John 13:14

Do you love your fellow believers unconditionally?

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"Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing."

Mark 11:25

Do you forgive others?

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“It is written, ‘My house will be a house of prayer.’”

Luke 19:46

Are you helping make Fellowship a house of prayer through your own prayer life and by being involved in praying with others?

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“Woe to you, hypocrites! You pay a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, yet you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy, and faith. These things should have been done without neglecting the others.”

Matthew 23:23

Do you give generously to the Lord’s work while also practicing justice, mercy and faith?

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“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... [and] teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28:19-20

Are you actively seeking to make disciples of the nations, especially of those in your own community?

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“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Acts 1:8

Are you serving Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit?

Do you find yourself having difficulty living in faithful obedience to Christ and His commands this morning? If so, then I propose to you that you have a heart problem, which is really a love problem, and today God is calling you, like His people in Jeremiah's day, to repent and return to Him.

Let the Lord radically transform your heart and pull you back close to Himself where you belong, where He wants you to be. Only a fresh encounter of repentance and returning to Him can lead you back to a fresh love for God.

Fellowship, the Bible clearly shows that we all have a tendency to have a heart-shift in our love relationship with Him, and that when we do our Lord is grieved that we would back away from that precious fellowship with Him.

Backsliding isn't something to treat lightly or carelessly. There can be devastating consequences. God takes our devotion to Him extremely seriously and so should we.

God desires that we love Him completely. That's what He wants you and I to do...

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"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."

Mark 12:30

He's also given us His prescription when we've allowed our heart to backslide away from Him in lukewarm Christian living...

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"But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first." Revelation 2:4-5a

Remember, God asks every person who knows Him to do three things:

- (Slide) 1. Love Him (make Him #1 in your heart)
2. Walk in His ways (reflect God and His Word in the way you live)
3. Keep His commands (obey His Word, the Bible)

Examine your heart and your relationship with the Lord this morning. God asks each of us to...

1. Love Him with all our heart, to make Him #1 in your heart

Do you love Him like you know you should? Have you had a heart-shift from where your heart once was? Do you have a lukewarm heart in relation to the Lord today? If so, do what the Lord in His Word has told us to do: repent and return to Him.

He asks us to...

2. Walk in His ways

Does your life reflect God and His Word in your priorities? In the way you talk at work? At school? At home? When you're with your friends who don't follow Christ?

Is walking in the ways of the Lord a pattern in your life, or is it an occasional choice you make?

God asks us to...

3. Keep His commands

Which characterizes your walk with Christ best – obedience or disobedience? Are you obeying what the Lord has shown you that He wants for you, for your life?

Has there ever been a time in the past when you knew God called you to go a certain direction and for whatever reason, you didn't do it, you didn't respond in obedience? You knew something was His will for you and you rebelled against it and refused to do it?

If you haven't do so, repent of that this morning and offer yourself to God anew to use you and to direct you in whatever He has for you.

e.g. John was a faithful Christian serving the Lord. He led a Bible Study Group at his church. He was active in the church's men's ministry. He went on missions trips and was considered faithful by everyone in his church family.

But inside, John was fighting for his spiritual life. His heart very, very slowly began to drift away from the Lord. At first it was so miniscule, that no one would have noticed.

He began wondering if he was somehow missing out on what life had for him. He started cutting corners in his business to maximize profits. He began embellishing the truth to his clients.

His marriage – always one that others envied – became a burden to him. He started compromising in various ways in His walk with Christ. Eventually, his eyes started wandering and not long after that he left his wife and kids.

It took time, but his business also began suffering and eventually under the weight of his lies and dishonesty, his finances collapsed and so did his health.

In John's absence his children struggled as well. Without their spiritual leader, they did things they wouldn't have done had he been there. John finally committed a crime and ended up in jail.

To the very end, he proclaimed his innocence and maintained that his walk with God had never been better. No one would have guessed that John would have ended up in this proud, fallen condition.

But it happened... one decision at a time as his heart, left unchecked and unguarded, slowly drifted away from the Lord until he was far from God. If it can happen to John, it can happen to me, it can happen to you.

Fellowship, Guard Your Heart above all else, because it is the source of your life with the Lord!