

# Keeping the Heart in the Season of Danger

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[ 0 : 00 ] Once again, Proverbs 4.23 says, Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

According to Solomon, the heart directs the course of everything else. Like a spring from which a river begins, the heart shapes everything about us, our words, our actions, our decisions. What flows from the heart determines the quality and direction of our lives. So to neglect the heart is to leave us vulnerable to all kinds of spiritual dangers.

In Matthew 15, Jesus said, What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart and defiles a person. For out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

These are what defile a person. In Luke 6, he said, The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good. And the evil person out of the evil treasure produces evil.

[ 1 : 11 ] For out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks. When David repented in Psalm 51, he prayed, Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

You see, he recognized that his fundamental need was not merely a change in his behavior, but a change in his innermost person, his very heart. If his heart was in the right place, everything else would follow.

So keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs or the issues of life. Lastly, Jesus said, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

And we could go on, but there is a definite emphasis in Scripture on the heart. Our innermost person, if you will.

In fact, the new covenant is all about God transforming the hearts of his people, rather than repeating his laws once again and saying, Okay, folks, I'll give you one more try to keep my law.

[ 2 : 18 ] He says, No, I will personally take care of the problem at its root. Through Ezekiel, he says, You shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

How so? I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh, and I will put my spirit within you, and therefore causing you to walk in my statutes and obey my rules.

You see, if all of life flows from the heart, outward reforms won't suffice. Think of a car.

If your car isn't running properly, you could put new tires on it, you could run it through the car wash, but you won't have solved the problem. The car may look better, but the real issue is on the inside.

It's under the hood. And under the new covenant, God essentially says, you need a new transmission, and I will provide it. Yet, as we all know too well, even with new hearts, we still wrestle with our flesh.

[ 3 : 30 ] We face temptations. We're prone to wander away from God. And that is why Proverbs says, keep your heart with all vigilance.

Guard it. Watch over it. Protect it. Again, everything flows from it. So with that, how do we keep our hearts?

Well, according to John Flabel, there are different, very practical approaches depending on the season of life. There are various tools, if you will, for various circumstances.

So today, and in the coming weeks, we will look at the different seasons of life and how we might keep our hearts through those seasons. And today, we will consider how to keep our hearts in a season of danger or a season of fear.

And as it happened, John Flabel knew something about living through a time of danger and fear. So Flabel was an English pastor in the 17th century.

[ 4 : 33 ] And this was a time when Protestantism reigned in England, but there was still a lot of unrest. The official state church was Protestant, that is the Church of England, but there were many things about the church that a lot of people still felt reform was necessary.

There still needed to be some purifying, so this gave rise to a group known as the Puritans. And out of the Puritans came the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists and the Baptists.

Well, Flavel was one of these Puritans. And in 1662, when Flavel was, I think, a 35-year-old-ish minister, Parliament passed what was called the Act of Uniformity, which required all ministers to fully conform to the rites and the ceremonies of the Church of England.

And this led to what we call the Great Ejection, when roughly 2,000 Puritan pastors, including Flavel, were excluded from the church.

He could not, in good conscience, accept the mandates that came down from Parliament. Now, Flavel continued to preach. He continued to lead his people underground.

[ 5 : 53 ] He had to do everything in secret, essentially, because an unlicensed minister could be fined or imprisoned, if not worse. John Bunyan, for example, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, he was kept in prison for 12 years during this time because he was preaching without a license.

So there was a lot of danger for Flavel and others during this time. There was more than enough reason to be fearful. And I believe, if I'm not mistaken, it was near the end of his life, as restrictions are starting to loosen and the Puritans are beginning to gain a bit more freedom that Flavel wrote, *Keeping the Heart*.

So in this work, you can imagine him being an older, perhaps more mature man who's in a good position to look back over a long season of danger and fear and provide some real hard-earned wisdom.

Now, God in his providence has kept you and I from experiencing what the Puritans experienced in that day, but that's not to say we don't know something about seasons of danger or fear.

Does anyone remember the first month or so of COVID? I was watching something just recently about the Cuban Missile Crisis in the 60s.

[ 7 : 16 ] There were quite a few people who went to bed one night believing the United States at any moment was about to erupt into a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. There were a lot of people who were terrified that night.

Do you remember how you felt on 9-11? But of course, we can go beyond national or global events. More often than not, seasons of fear are quite personal.

You know, a cancer diagnosis, losing a job, losing a spouse or a child. There's a real sense in which we are always just one step away from real, significant, personal tragedy.

So the question is, how do we keep our hearts when calamity strikes? What can we do to guard the core of who we are as God's people when everything falls apart or at least everything threatens to fall apart?

What do we do when we enter a season of danger or fear? Well, John Flavel gives us 14 very practical ways to keep or guard our hearts in times of fear.

[ 8 : 33 ] Now, for the sake of time, I'll have to move through these relatively quickly, but I hope to capture the essence of each one. So first, rest in God's sovereignty.

Rest in God's sovereignty. One of the primary reasons we grow anxious or fearful is that we let ourselves forget who's in control.

We see the headlines in the news. We feel the pressure. We experience the loss and we start to think that everything is just spinning out of control. Life begins to feel like chaos, but that's not true. God is sovereign. Amen? In Isaiah 46, the Lord says, I am God and there is no other. I am God and there is none like me declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done saying my counsel shall stand and I will accomplish all my purpose.

God alone rules over every creature, every event, every single molecule in the universe. In other words, he doesn't react to history.

[ 9 : 49 ] He doesn't react to what's happening on this earth. He writes the history. In Ezekiel chapter 1, Ezekiel is given this vision that's really hard to imagine.

He sees a violent storm approaching. Then he sees these four creatures that each have four faces and four wings. They appear to be on fire while flashing like lightning.

And then he sees a wheel within a wheel and these wheels can somehow move without exactly turning. I mean, the entire scene is incredible and confusing and perhaps chaotic.

And yet, there above all of it is a throne. And there's a man sitting on the throne. And Ezekiel says this man has the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.

I think that's a pretty neat picture of our world. From our vantage point, everything appears random and chaotic, but look up. There's God on his throne.

[10:58] He's in control of everything we're seeing. We may not fully understand what he's doing or why he's doing it, but he has complete control over it. Yet, I think better yet, he has a purpose for all of it.

So when life feels like it's galloping on a red horse of war or a black horse of death as we see described in the book of Revelation, remember those horses aren't running wild.

The Lord has a tight grip on those reins. Hebrews 1.3, he upholds the universe by the word of his power. Now, just because God is sovereign doesn't mean life stops being hard at times.

I think we understand that. It doesn't mean we'll never face challenges or dangers, but it does mean that those things, number one, have a purpose, and number two, God is still in control.

Our Heavenly Father is sovereign, and he's not merely sovereign. He's also good, which takes us to our second point.

[12:10] See God as your father. See God as your father. The Flavel uses the illustration of a man with a sword.

If you, let's say, walk out of your house and you see a man standing there with a sword, you would probably be terrified. You'd be concerned if nothing else.

But now, let's say you walk out into the backyard and you see your husband or your father carrying a sword. You may be curious, but you probably won't be afraid.

Why? You trust your husband. You trust your father. You know his heart. You know his love for you. So the sword in his hand doesn't imply the same threat.

that's the difference between looking at this world through fear or through faith. Things would be different if God were impersonal or unknowable.

[13:11] If he were, let's say, an arbitrary, supernatural dictator, we probably wouldn't find much comfort in knowing he's in control. but we know him.

He's our father. Paul says in Romans 8, 15, for you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

The spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. The same God who laid the foundations of the earth says in Isaiah 43, 1, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel, fear not, for I have redeemed you.

I have called you by name. You are mine. Jesus says, God the Father knows every hair on your head. No one, no one loves you or knows you better than our Heavenly Father.

So, what reason do we have to fear? Third, remember the commandments of Christ. Remember the commandments of Christ.

[14:34] This one might sting a little, but the fact is the Lord commands us not to be fearful. keep in mind, He knows precisely what we face in this life, and yet He says, do not fear.

At least three times in Matthew 10, He commands His disciples not to fear. Starting at verse 26, He says, so have no fear of them, those who persecute you, that is, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known.

What I tell you in the dark say in the light, and what you hear whispered proclaim on the housetops, and do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny, and not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore.

You are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father who is in heaven.

[15:55] So, we can either fear God, or fear something else. And Christ says, do not fear something else. If you fear God, you have no reason to fear anything else.

Now, to be clear, Jesus is not harshly barking commands at His terrified disciples as if He has no sympathy whatsoever, no understanding. You have to realize this commandment is coming from the Good Shepherd who Himself lays down His life for the sheep.

Fourth, remember how much time you have wasted with fear. Remember how much time you've wasted with fear.

So, think back over your life. I'm sure you've had many fears. I'm sure you've had many hard times when you've anticipated the worst.

Maybe you couldn't sleep, you couldn't eat because you were so worried about something. Well, did your fear help you? Chances are the bad thing you imagine never materialized.

[17:11] Listen to what the Lord says in Isaiah 51 verses 13 and 14. I am He who comforts you. Who are you that are terrified, excuse me, who are you that are afraid of man who dies, of the Son of Man who is made like grass and have forgotten the Lord your Maker who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth and you fear continually all the day because of the wrath of the oppressor when He sets Himself to destroy.

And where is the wrath of the oppressor? In other words, you've been worried sick all day. But what happened? Where is this great danger you were so afraid of?

It never came. Of course, sometimes the things we do fear really does happen. The war starts, the diagnosis comes, someone dies.

But even then, we may find that our fear is actually bigger than the trouble itself. Our fear multiplies, it amplifies the problem, it makes our suffering twice as heavy.

All the while, God is saying to us, cast your burden on me and I will sustain you. Psalm 55, 22. fifth, sinful fear is worse than what you fear.

[18:49] Sinful fear is worse than what you fear. Put another way, fear does more harm than the danger itself. Think about it. God tells us not to fear. So, fear dishonors Him, it disobeys Him.

Furthermore, clouds our judgment and it leads us into greater temptations and so on. Think of the Israelites at the Red Sea, right? God has already saved them from Egypt, but they look back and they see Pharaoh's army coming at them, coming for them, and what do they do?

They panic, they cry out in fear, they question Moses, they question the Lord Himself. And when they look out at the sea, they assume this body of water will be their deathbed.

Either the Egyptians will crush them or the sea will drown them. One way or another, they are doomed. And yet, what happens? That very sea, by the power of God, becomes their pathway to deliverance.

Sound familiar? You know, we see potential danger, we assume the worst, and our trust in God just falls apart. God's In Exodus 14, Moses says to the people, fear not, stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today.

[20:14] For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you. And notice this part, and you have only to be silent.

Do you hear the mild rebuke in that? This kind of fear is sinful. And it does more damage to us, to our hearts, to our souls, than the danger itself.

It robs us of peace. It robs God of the glory He deserves. It destroys our trust in Him. So what do we do instead?

Sixth, rest on God's promises. Rest on God's promises. This may be the most important point Flavel makes.

God has given us precious, solid, unshakable promises. And these promises are for any time, but especially for seasons of danger and fear in our lives.

[21:19] For example, Romans 8, 28. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.

And what's the context of Romans 8, 28? Don't forget that part. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

No. In all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. In Genesis 32, we read the story of Jacob learning that he will once again meet his brother Esau.

Well, the last time he saw his brother, Esau threatened to kill him. So he's terrified. You'll remember that's the night that he wrestled with God.

He's scared. He's desperate for the Lord's blessing, but before he wrestles with God, he prays and says in Genesis 32, 11, please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him that he may come and attack me.

[ 22 : 35 ] But you said, I will surely do you good. Do you see what happened? He knew the promise of God.

And even though he was scared, he went straight to the Lord in prayer. And essentially reminded himself once again of that promise. He basically preaches the promise to himself while also pleading with God to fulfill that promise.

So rest on God's promises. Seventh, remember God's faithfulness. Remember God's faithfulness. This is something we're prone to forget when we're afraid. All we see is the threat right in front of us. But the Bible calls on us to remember who God is and what he has already done.

Consider David before he fought Goliath. You know, he didn't turn inward and think to himself, you know, I got this.

[ 23 : 40 ] I can handle this. No, he looked back. Specifically, he looked back at what the Lord had done for him in the past. In 1 Samuel 17, verse 37, he says to King Saul, the Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.

See, the reason David wasn't afraid of this great warrior Goliath is because he had experienced the Lord's faithfulness.

And that gave him confidence regarding the future. He essentially said, God helped me before, why would he stop now? Paul does the same thing in 2 Corinthians 1.

In verse 10, he says, God delivered us from such a deadly peril. And he will deliver us. On him, we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.

So like David, Paul's confidence is based on God's faithfulness. So think back over your own life.

Think back to a time when you were afraid and you didn't know how things would turn out.

[ 24 : 52 ] Well, here you are. The Lord sustained you. Maybe things didn't work out quite in the way you thought they would, but God has carried you through.

So you can say with David, this I know that God is for me. Eighth, find courage in obedience.

Find courage in obedience. Let's say your heart is feeling a little unsettled. You're nervous, you're anxious about the future. Peter, it helps to ask, am I walking in obedience to God?

Am I doing what he has called me to do? Well, if you can answer yes in good conscience, take courage. 1 Peter 3.13 asks, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

According to Peter, just one chapter later, 1 Peter 4.19, therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good.

[ 26 : 03 ] It's much easier to face trials when you know you're walking in obedience to God.

Obviously, there will still be hardships. Peter mentions suffering according to God's will, but I'm not talking about avoiding trials, I'm talking about what leads to confidence during those trials.

Martin Luther is a great example of this. You probably remember it. The Diet of Worms, he was told to recant all of his teachings so that he could avoid punishment, whatever that might be, imprisonment, death, torture.

And what did he say? Here I stand. I can do no other. Where was he standing? He was standing on the word of God.

So even though he was facing possible torture and death, he had this incredible confidence because he knew, he knew he was doing the right thing. Psalm 118.6 says, the Lord is on my side, I will not fear.

What can man do to me? And this leads us right into the next point. Ninth, repent of sin so your conscience can be clean.

[ 27 : 28 ] Repent of sin. When Cain murdered his brother Abel in Genesis 4, his first impulse was to say, whoever finds me will kill me.

The same man who is so bold as to defy God and ignore God's warnings, killing his own brother, suddenly becomes very timid, very anxious, even paranoid.

And that's what sin and its subsequent guilt does to us. And rightfully so, it weakens the heart. As Flavel says, a guilty conscience is more terrified with imagined dangers than a pure conscience is with real ones.

We see a similar thing with Herod in the New Testament. After Herod killed John the Baptist and then he heard about Jesus and his miracles, he's suddenly paranoid to the point that he's thinking John the Baptist has come back from the dead.

That's what guilt does. when your heart is weighed down by guilt, even the smallest troubles feel huge. When you're at peace with God, however, even the greatest dangers, they lose their power to

shake you.

[ 28 : 56 ] As Proverbs 28.1 says, the wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion. So, if you feel your heart trembling, just ask yourself, is there a sin I need to confess?

Is there something I need to repent from? Do I need to turn to God for forgiveness? If so, run to Him immediately. Confess your sin, repent. Hebrews 9.14, how much more will the blood of Christ purify our conscience?

Tenth, trust God with your life. Trust God with your life. I believe Flavel refers to this as exercising holy trust.

I like that. We're not talking about a vague optimism or wishful thinking. This is a deliberate act of faith. It is confessing to God, I am not in control of the situation, but you are.

Like David in Psalm 56, it is turning to God and saying, verse 3, when I am afraid, I put my trust in you. It's what Isaiah points to when he says, Isaiah 26.3, you keep Him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you because He trusts in you.

[ 30 : 29 ] Why wouldn't we trust in Him? Not only is He sovereign, in full control of every moment, but He's also our Heavenly Father who is so interested in the good of His children.

So rather than dwell on the dangers in front of us, we should look to those promises that God has given us, we should meditate on them, we should dwell on those things. 11.

Consider what your fear says to the world. Flavel asks, do you think it is for the honor of the faith that Christians should be as fearful as hares or rabbits jumping at every sound?

Now, He's not suggesting we should fake courage. I don't think that's what He's getting at. Instead, He's simply reminding us that our actions preach a pretty loud sermon to the watching world.

If they see believers panicking or falling into despair when times get tough, then what do you suppose they will conclude about our faith and more importantly, about our God?

[ 31 : 47 ] Think about Peter, who denied even knowing Christ at his arrest. That gave people all the more reason to mock Jesus when even his own disciples would not stand by him in really the first moment of real testing.

They ran away. What did that say about Jesus in their minds? Or we might consider a positive example. Think again about David. before his fight with Goliath.

While all of Israel refused to confront this giant because they were scared, David stepped up and said, who is this guy? He has defied the armies of the living God.

The very reputation of God was at stake as far as David was concerning. He was not willing to let anyone go on thinking that God is not capable of defending his people and overcoming the single man.

Another example is Nehemiah. When the enemies threatened him in Nehemiah 6, he didn't run and hide. No, he said, should such a man as I run away? Should a man who strives to honor God, a man who perhaps more importantly trusts in God run away from danger?

[ 33 : 08 ] the world is watching. Our kids are watching. And what we do, or perhaps fail to do in some cases, tells them something about our God.

Twelve, rest in your eternal inheritance. Rest in your eternal inheritance.

inheritance. If you are forever safe in Christ, what do you really have to fear? Jesus said in Luke 12, I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more they can do.

But I will warn you whom to fear, fear him who after he has killed has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Now, Jesus frames this in, we might call it the negative sense, but we also have many passages that frame it in the positive sense.

For example, Romans 8 again, nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. You see, the Bible never minimizes our pain.

[ 34 : 28 ] It doesn't minimize the reality of death. death, but at the same time, it wants the believer to know that pain in this life is not the worst possible thing that could happen to us.

And death is not the end. Yes, our bodies could be destroyed, we will die, but those in Christ will then come face to face with Christ our Savior.

Paul said, Christ will be honored in my body whether by life or by death. For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. It's a win-win.

In other words, as difficult or as scary as this life can be at times, the prospect of pain, death, the Christian will never see hell.

Life on this earth is as close to hell as we will ever come, and when this life is over, we will enjoy paradise with our Lord forevermore.

[ 35 : 29 ] God's love. So, remember that. Don't lose sight of that. 13, fear the Lord instead of everything else.

We've already read this. I read from Luke 12, we are called to fear God, not the world or our circumstances. We are called to fear God. And Flavel illustrates this beautifully when he says the best way to put out a fire is not to blow on it, but to pour water on it.

And the best way to put out sinful fear is to replace it with holy fear. That is the fear of the Lord.

Now, to be clear, fearing God is not some crippling, paralyzing fear.

It is awe. It is reverence. It is recognizing God is absolutely holy. He is not to be treated flippantly.

He is not to be treated lightly.

Think of Isaiah 8, 12, and 13, which say, Do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread, but the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy.

[ 36 : 41 ] Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. Do you see the exchange in that? We are not told to stop being afraid necessarily.

We are not told to put away all fear. Instead, we are told to essentially replace a lesser, sinful fear with a greater God-honoring fear.

And when we fear the Lord, fear of man or fear of danger has a way of just melting away. How so? Well, at that point, we become more afraid of dishonoring God than losing our earthly comforts, for instance.

We suddenly care more about remaining faithful than remaining comfortable. In short, don't let your fears push you into a corner. Let them push you toward our heavenly Father.

And last but not least, 14, pray. Pray. When your heart is heavy, don't dwell on your fears.

[ 37 : 47 ] Take them straight to God. Cast your cares on Him. Talk to Him about them. That's what Hannah did in 1 Samuel 1 when she was distressed. That's what David did over and over again throughout the Psalms.

That's what Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane, for example. Now, think about that. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God incarnate, fell to His knees in desperate prayer when He faced the prospect of suffering.

He cried out to His Father in heaven. Hebrews 5, 7 says, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence.

Now, what happened after Jesus prayed in the Garden? Well, the danger was still there, wasn't it? He still went to the cross, but He went to the cross, didn't He?

He went to the cross. When He prayed, He effectively exchanged that inner turmoil with confidence, perhaps, with a measure of peace.

[ 39 : 00 ] He went to the cross, willingly, He went to the cross. Paul says, this is Philippians 4, 6, and 7, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God, and God will change everything.

Your life will be smooth sailing from here on out. No, Paul says, let your request be made known to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

And that brings us right back to where we started. Proverbs 4, 23, keep your heart, with all vigilance. Paul says, prayer is precisely the tool we need to guard our hearts.

Pray, pray, pray. Don't try to face your fears alone. Go to God continually, persistently in prayer, and He will give you peace. He will guard your heart.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you are not distant in seasons of danger and fear.

[ 40 : 17 ] You are strong for the weak, and you are faithful to all who trust in you. So help us to keep our hearts. Help us to remember your sovereignty and your promises and your steadfast love.

Guard us from the lies that fear speaks to us. Fill us with holy confidence, not in ourselves, but in you alone, and let our lives bear witness to the world that you are more than enough, and we ask all of this in Christ's name, amen.

pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.