

Equipped to guard your heart

I recently followed up on an advert I'd seen on TV. It was promoting the benefits of a low-fat spread and gave information about a website that allows you to answer a few simple questions about your health and, on the basis of these answers, tells you how healthy (or not) your heart is. People with no family history of heart disease, who ate healthy food, and took plenty of exercise scored more positively than those whose family members had heart problems, whose eating habits needed a major overhaul, and who spent a lot of their time being inactive. The high scorers were, to some extent, guarding their hearts against disease by eating and exercising well, although they could do nothing about their family history.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we too need to guard our hearts - our "inner person" - from various "diseases" which, if unchecked, will damage our effectiveness for him. We can't do anything about our natural family history of heart disease and, likewise, our spiritual family history is also beyond our control. We've inherited a sinful nature from our first parents, Adam and Eve, and this is an inevitable part of being human. It's because of this that our hearts need guarding. However, in the same way as we can make lifestyle changes to protect our physical hearts, we can also put measures in place to guard our spiritual heart health. Here are some suggestions...

Take appropriate exercise

If we want to maintain a physically healthy heart, we need to add some kind of regular exercise to our schedule. The same is true of guarding our hearts in a spiritual sense and it's useful to ask ourselves the following questions:

- Am I *exercising* faith in God about a specific matter of concern to me?
- Is there an unconfessed sin over which I need to *exercise* repentance?
- To what extent do I *exercise* discernment in choosing my friends?
- Do I make a habit of consciously *exercising* control over what goes into my mind?

These are some examples of the importance of exercise in guarding our hearts against spiritual dangers.

Eat the right kind of food

Jesus said, "*People need more than bread for their life; they must feed on every word of God*" (Matthew 4:4, NLT). How are you doing in this area? Are you making it a priority to read and digest God's word on a daily basis? When you read the bible, do you make sure you have a balanced diet of biblical truth by reading different kinds of passages and not just your favourite ones? If you're looking for some help here, you might want to check out the **Equipped for Living Bible Reading Plan** that is free to download from our website. Reading the Bible, in itself, is no guarantee that we'll always avoid danger or become immune to certain sins. But, it's through reading it that we become aware of what sin is and, by heeding its many warnings, we can respond appropriately. You see, God, in his love, wants us to guard our hearts so we can avoid lifestyle habits that are dangerous to our spiritual well-being, for example:

- Do I need to guard my heart against the love of money? (Hebrews 13:5)
- Do I need to guard my heart against sexual sin? (1 Thessalonians 4:3)
- Do I need to guard my heart against gossip? (Proverbs 16:28)
- Do I need to guard my heart against complaining? (Philippians 2:14)
- Do I need to guard my heart against anger? (Psalm 4:4)
- Do I need to guard my heart against worry? (Philippians 4:6)

These are just some of the 'need-to-guard-your-heart' things the Bible draws to our attention. If you're not already doing so, why not make guarding your heart a priority?