

Outlook

How to keep an optimistic attitude (CREATION Health)

KEY PASSAGES—PROVERBS 3:5-7 & PROVERBS 4:23

YOUR OUTLOOK WILL SHAPE YOUR LIFE

If you have a glass that contains 50% water, is it half full or half empty? Science has given us some fascinating insights into the effect of an optimistic outlook in your life:

- Optimism enables you to be more successful than your talents may suggest.
- In a study of almost 20,000 people over 30 years, people who were optimistic had a 50% decrease in the risk of early death.
- Research shows that optimists achieve above their potential and are likely to remain out of depression or else recover quickly from depression versus the opposite for pessimists.
- Those who worry moderately have twice the risk of heart attack as those who rarely worry. The risk for those who worry a lot goes up 250%.
- Placebos: Men who were told they were given a drug to increase hair growth found it did increase growth, even though it was a placebo. Children were given a drug and told it would increase their lung capacity, and it did, even though it was a placebo. Women were given a drug and told it would cure them of nausea and vomiting, and it did, even though the drug had been used traditionally to induce vomiting.

There is an incredible link between outlook and your health.

WHAT CREATES A HEALTHY OUTLOOK?

The Big Idea: your outlook—and therefore everything that happens to you—is determined by the condition of your heart.

Today, the heart is considered the place where we feel. But in the Old Testament, the heart was also the source of thoughts, and therefore the will. **These thoughts and feelings that live inside my heart create my outlook—like coloured glasses on my eyes.**

Over the last 150 years, a saying has been attributed to many people, "Plant a thought and reap a word; plant a word and reap an action; plant an action and reap a habit; plant a habit and reap a character; plant a character and reap a destiny." So your outlook will determine your destiny, both in this world and the world to come.

So how can we develop a healthy outlook? I will share insights from two texts in Proverbs. The first focuses on protecting my heart from enemies that will try and get inside and warp my outlook, while the second teaches me to do something proactively that will keep my outlook healthy.

PROVERBS 4:23—GUARDING WHAT COMES IN

Understanding the text

"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

- **Above all else** This is a most important thing, above everything else that I think is important.
- **guard** To watch over. This word was used for watchmen on the walls of cities who were looking out for enemies attempting to invade. There are enemies who want to get inside your heart and cause damage.
- **your heart** The heart in the Old Testament normally refers to the non-physical part of humans. It is the core of our being. The heart is the source of both my thoughts and feelings but would mostly refer to the mind. The heart is the seat of our intellect, our ethics and our power to choose.
- **for everything you do flows from it** "Everything" is an all encompassing word. Everything that happens to me in this life and thus in eternity is the result of the type of thoughts and feelings I have inside my heart.

Summary Everything in your life is shaped by the thoughts and feelings which spring from your heart. Proverbs calls you to act as a watchman on the walls of your heart to prevent enemies from entering. These enemies are aiming to corrupt both your thoughts and feelings, because once this happens, these enemies will have destroyed your positive outlook and destiny.

How can I guard my heart?

How can I guard my thoughts and feelings from the enemies that try to invade?

Well, where do you gather new thoughts and feelings? Your eyes and ears are the windows and doors into your heart.

- **Eyes** TV, Netflix, movies, internet
- **Ears** Radio, music, podcasts, conversations

When you experience anything with your eyes and ears, it will always plant the seeds of new thoughts and feelings within your heart that will be reaped in your life.

We have to be careful because we can even bring thoughts and feelings from what we think is an imaginary world and import them into the real world.

- **Vikings** As I prepare these notes, I can hear the roaring of vikings through my window as they film the next series. You can watch a TV programme like Vikings and say it is just a bit of fun because it is not real. The violence and sex is just a story. But do not think that the images of sex and violence that you would see will not give birth to thoughts and

feelings about sex and violence in your heart or the hearts of your children that will have real consequences in the real world.

- **MTV** My daughter went to the birthday party for a 4 year old friend. They turned on MTV for music but eventually put a blanket over the TV because of the images that are shown with such music. But don't you think that what these children heard with their ears has already influenced their little hearts—shaping thoughts and feelings.

3 steps to guarding your heart

So how can you guard your heart—so that your thoughts and feelings will be protected from invasion by alien thoughts and feelings intent on corrupting what is already inside?

1. **Recognise that alien thoughts and feelings normally enter your heart because they are invited in—by the heart's carnal nature (Jeremiah 17:9)** Even though I know watching a sex scene may be wrong, my carnal nature enjoys it. I am ultimately responsible for what I allow inside.
2. **Physically move yourself to another location (Matthew 5:29)** You may have to take drastic action to avoid seeing and hearing poisonous images or harmful conversations. The key is not simply using lots of effort to stop the bad things coming in, but in learning to turn my eyes and feet towards what is holy and godly.
3. **Regular communion with God (2 Corinthians 3:18)** Place yourself where your heart can contemplate God's glory, at least twice a day. Remember that while God is a transforming God, He is only able to work through your heart, so He has to be welcomed into the heart—not just because you want to claim salvation and get to Heaven, but because you want to claim salvation from the enemies that are continually attacking your thoughts and feelings.

PROVERBS 3:5-7—CHOOSING WHAT GOES OUT

Understanding the text

While I need to stand and guard my heart from enemies, our second verse instructs us to do something proactively with our hearts.

"⁵Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. ⁷Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. ⁸This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones."

- **Trust** Complete confidence that brings peace. This is something I proactively choose to do and sets the direction of my attention.
- **all your heart** Not most of it, but 100% of my heart, which is my whole mind, including all my thoughts and feelings. Everything about who I am. Less than 100% trust does not bring peace.
- **in all your ways submit** Again, God calls me to submit, yield, everything in my life to him. The word ALL again.
- **This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones** Such faith which results in submitting everything to God is not just something that is merely intellectual but as my mind, body and spirit are completely interrelated, trust—or the lack of it—impacts me emotionally and physiologically.

Summary

While you have to guard your heart from enemies to maintain a healthy outlook, you also have to gird up all of your heart to faith, and that may require spending a lot more time on your knees.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How healthy are your thoughts and feelings, towards God, each other, and yourself?
- In what ways may you be suffering because of your own thoughts and feelings?
- In what areas do you need to especially guard your heart?
- What is it going to take for you to trust God with ALL of your heart?

1

LIFE POINT

My outlook is shaped by my heart—my thoughts and feelings

2

LIFE POINT

Thoughts and feelings impact the health of body, mind and spirit

3

LIFE POINT

My thoughts and feelings are reshaped and protected by faith

4

LIFE POINT

Faith that changes my thoughts and feelings is found on my knees