



# Links Players

## OH, TO BE WISE 4: A GUARDED HEART

*Above all else, guard your heart,  
for everything you do flows from it. (Proverbs 4:23, NIV)*

ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH YOUR GOLF SWING? Your answer to this question probably depends on the day of the week. It may also depend on whether you're on the practice range or the golf course. Our tempo and positions can be just right when the balls have stripes on them, then it all comes crashing down with just one or two loose swings when the holes have boundaries and our errors bring consequences. Oh, golf.

One thing many teaching professionals will tell you, however, is that the practice range is a good place to be when your swing is smooth and under control. Repetitions groove what is working.

Last week, our devotion and study zeroed in on the heart. It's the place where God puts us to the test. Today we follow that up with a look at encouraging and maintaining a heart right with God.

Consider our proverb today, which tells us that everything we do flows from our heart. Jesus said that "the mouth speaks what the heart is full of" (Luke 6:45). What's in your heart will come out for others to see and hear. In our time, it is not uncommon for famous people, including athletes, to say inappropriate things. Caught on camera, these candid slips cause embarrassment and shame. Such "accidental" words also cause apologies that sound like this: "I am sorry for what I said. Those words do not reflect who I really am." And yet Jesus would say, "I am sorry, too, for those words come from your heart, so they do reflect who you are."

The reason our words and actions often reveal a person we do not want to be is because they reflect the sin that resides in us. They disclose our heart. But if we are in Christ, that heart is changing. He is making us new day by day. In this we can be encouraged that who we were yesterday and who we still sometimes show ourselves to be today does not have to be who we are tomorrow. In order for this to happen with consistency, though, we must guard (or keep) our hearts. That is, we must encase them with Scripture—the words of God—which is our defense against the falsehoods that come to us by way of the world's communication, as well as against the lies we tell ourselves to justify ungodly actions. Just as we can groove our best golf swing, we can groove righteousness through steady exposure to God's word and repetitious, obedient living.

**Opening questions** When do you know your swing is really working? What do you do to maintain this good swing (or putting stroke) as long as you can?

**READING** Proverbs 4:23; Ezekiel 11:17-21; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

### 'Above all else' (Proverbs 4)

Solomon began this proverb with the phrase "above all else." What else might we mistakenly give priority to before tending to our heart? What are some of the things against which we must guard our heart?

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### New hearts (Ezekiel 11)

While first directed to Israel, we find enduring promises and principles in these prophetic words. Who will renew the hearts of those who have turned from God? What will be the evidence of these new hearts? What must we guard against if we are to serve God wholly?

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### Fixed and fortified (2 Corinthians 4)

What keeps a believer in Christ from losing heart, even when trials come? How do you think fixing one's eyes is related to guarding one's heart?

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Written by Jeff Hopper ©2021 Links Players International. An accompanying introductory video for this study is available here: <https://youtu.be/2RGY-CrIFhY>