

## Part 4: The Heart of the Matter

*NOTE: The following content is a raw transcript and has not been edited for grammar, punctuation, or word usage.*

We're in the final episode of our series *Guardrails*. If you've been with us for a while you know why we call the series *Guardrails* but if not, a guardrail, as you already know, is a system designed to keep vehicles from straying into dangerous or off-limit areas. Guardrails are never placed in the danger zone. Guardrails are always placed in the what? The safety zone. That's right. Guardrails are designed on the highway to do two things primarily: To direct us and protect us. But as we've said throughout this series, the highway is not the only place we need guardrails in our lives. We need some financial guardrails. We need some moral guardrails. We need relational guardrails. We need guardrails in our marriage. And specifically, when we talk about a guardrail outside the context of the highway or curves or bridges, a guardrail is actually a personal standard of behavior that becomes a matter of conscience.

Today, as we wrap up this series, I wanna talk about what I think is the most important guardrail of all, for all of us to establish. I wanna talk about how to guard your heart.

Solomon who was considered in the ancient times to be the wisest person that ever lived, some people still think he's the wisest person that ever lived. He wrote the book of Proverbs. He wrote Song of Solomon. He wrote about money, relationships, marriage, all kinds of relationships, work, He wrote about everything.

But in the book of Proverbs, he says, essentially, "Hey, all that stuff I wrote about, it's really important but there's one thing I don't want you to miss. If you forget everything else I've said," If you never had that conversation with one of your parents or maybe with one of your kids, "if you forget everything else I've said," here's what Solomon says. "If you forget everything else I said, above all else guard your heart." Guard your heart. I've said a lot of important things but above everything I've said, guard your heart. Well, Solomon, why is that such a big deal? And he says this, because or for everything, everything, everything, everything you do flows from it. Now what if that's true?

And this isn't even like a religious thought. What if that's true? What if everything we do erupts from or flows from something that's on the inside of us? What if everything we do originates within? Well, if that's the case, then whatever within is and we don't, obviously it's not our physical heart but it comes from within us somewhere. If that's the case, then learning to guard that within part because it impacts the without part would be super important. So the question is what does it look like? What does it look like to begin to guard your heart?

One day, a thousand years after Solomon wrote that, a thousand years later Jesus is with these guys and they're doing their Jesus and their disciples thing, healing people and teaching and preaching, and wherever Jesus went, perhaps you know this, wherever Jesus went there was a crowd that followed him of religious leaders, Pharisees, teachers of the laws, scribes, priests, high priests, all kinds of people and they would be on the outside of the crowd because their goal was to trick Jesus and to drive a wedge between he and the crowd so that once they could isolate him they could arrest him. Because as long as there was a crowd, the religious leaders weren't allowed.

But every once in a while, they would work their way to the front of the line and say, "Jesus, we have a question for you," and their questions were always trick questions which makes reading the gospels fascinating. On one of these particular days a couple of guys made their way to the front of the crowd and they said, "Jesus, we have a question for you. Why do your disciples, the folks that follow you most closely, why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?" I'll explain what that is in just a minute. "Why don't they wash their hands before they eat?"

What they were referring to is this. In the Old Testament law, the high priests and the priests and anybody that was to do sacred work before God had to do certain ceremonial washings to make sure they were always ready to do God's work, because you did not wanna touch something unclean and then do God's work. So your hands had to constantly be clean. Well, over time, and so this was a tradition they had. Well, actually, it was a law they had for the religious leaders

but then they turned it into a tradition for everybody and they imposed on everybody else this sort of guardrail rule that said, everybody needs to do these ceremonial washings so they don't accidentally touch something unclean, like something dead or blood or something that was off-limits to ancient Jewish people, touch that and then touch food and put food in their mouth. They said everybody needs to do these washings. Well, the law didn't teach that. So Jesus wasn't breaking one of the 10 commandments or one of the laws, he just wasn't paying attention to one of their traditions because they made it up. And Jesus chuckled and thought to himself, "Are you crazy to bring this up?" And he said to them, Jesus replied, "Okay, let me ask you a question. Why do you actually break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? You're accusing me of breaking a tradition that's not even a command of God. You actually break a command of God in order to protect one of your man-made traditions."

And so Jesus tells them exactly what he's talking about. He said, "For God said," and then he named one of the top 10, this is like the table of contents for the entire law. "And God said 'honor your father and your mother,'" which they all knew that law. "But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is devoted to God, they are not to honor their father and their mother with it." Now, his audience knew exactly what he was talking about. We read that and think, "We have no idea what you're talking about." So here's what he was talking about, that these religious leaders had come up with a tradition that allowed them to violate the law to honor your father and your mother and here's what their tradition was, it's pretty crafty.

They had this rule that you could just verbally dedicate or give away everything you owned, so a moderately wealthy person, very wealthy person could just say, "I dedicate all my belongings to the temple. Everything I own I now give to the temple." But according to this tradition, you could use what you own to support you and your immediate family as long as you lived. So what they did is they came up with a rule that kept them from being generous because anytime somebody said, asked them to do something, they could say, "Uh-huh, no giving while I'm living. There's no giving while I'm living. There's no giving while I'm living because I've already given everything to the temple, now God allows me to use all this wealth to support me and my immediate family." And so what would happen is their aging parents would come to them needing help get this, and they would say to their parents, "Oh Mom, Oh Dad, I would love to help you out but I can't give you anything because I've already dedicated it to God". See, Jesus, he is having none of that. He says, "Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your 'stupid,'" I added that word, "your 'stupid' [laughter] tradition, you hypocrites, you've come up with a rule to keep that allows you to get by with not obeying the overt will of God, Honor your father and your mother."

So the religious leaders shrink back into the crowd and they shrink back in the crowd, kinda going, "Who came up with that stupid question?" "I don't know what might... You said it was a good question." 'Cause they would just humiliate themselves constantly in front of the crowd.

So then Jesus, you should read the Gospels, it's fascinating. Okay, so then Jesus turns to the crowd, 'cause all the religious leaders have walked off for the time being. He says to the crowd, "Listen to me, I wanna make sure you understand what just happened between me and the religious leaders. I wanna make sure you're clear." Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand."

."What goes into someone's mouth, does not defile them..." When you put the wrong thing in your mouth it does not defile you and defile you has to do with a person's relationship with God." In other words, what you put in your mouth does not make you unworthy to God. What you put in your mouth does not put you at odds with God. Now this was a brand new idea, brand new idea. So this was a shift. The law, the ancient law of Moses, God's contract with Israel was all about staying clean, it was all vertical. Is God happy? Is God happy? Is God happy? Let's keep God happy. It was all eye to the sky. And Jesus says, "That day is coming to an end. What you put in your mouth is no longer gonna defile you in the presence of God. But what comes out of your mouth is what defiles you. And Jesus turns to these guys and I think he was having fun with them honestly, He said this "Are you still so dull? [laughter] Are you still so dumb? Are you not able to follow me?" And they're like, "We're following."

Jesus gathers his 12, now he's got the small group and he says, "Okay, I'm gonna go slow, I wanna make sure you understand this, so I'm gonna go slow. You tell me if I'm going too fast for you guys, okay? Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach. Everybody following me? "Yeah". "And then out of the body. Everybody

following me?" And was like, "Jesus we know that, duh". He's like, "I just wanna make sure I was not going too fast for you, okay? Into the mouth, into the stomach, out of the body". And they kinda chuckle. And then Jesus gets serious and he says, "But, the things that comes out of a person's mouth, come from the heart. The things that come out of a person's mouth, come from inside the person and he uses the heart as sort of this figure of speech. The things that come out of a person's mouth, they come from the heart. And now he gets real serious. "And that's what defiles them." And it's these things, these that defile a person. The thing that puts a person at odds with God is not what goes in, it's what comes out. The thing that puts a person at odds with God is not what they eat, but how their words affect the people that God loves, that words that offend others offend God.

I'm telling you, as obvious as that may be to some of us, this was brand new territory. This was a complete reversal of everything they had been brought up to believe, because they had been brought up to believe that priority number one is keep God happy, and you keep God happy by doing certain things, and not doing certain things. I mean, if other people aren't happy, too bad. We gotta keep God happy. And then Jesus says this, are you ready? If you've been daydreaming or doing something else at home, okay, don't miss this part. This is super important. "For," says Jesus, "For out of the heart... For out of the heart, come evil thoughts. Murder," that's an activity, "Adultery," that's an activity, "Sexual immorality," that's an activity, "Theft, false testimony, slander." He says, "From the heart, comes all these things that defile a person." Well, why do these defile people? Because they hurt people, and when you hurt people God loves, you hurt God. And when you offend people that God loves, you offend God. And when you do things that harm other people, it offends God. That's what defiles a person in God's presence. It's not what goes in, it's what comes out and how it affects other people. "These," He said, "These. These behaviors. These behaviors that impact other people, these horizontal behaviors, these are what defile a person." This is what makes God a little bit upset.

They go, "Wait. Mistreating other people puts us at odds with God, not breaking dietary laws and cleanliness laws?" Jesus says, "No, I wanna make sure you know, but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them. If what harms people offends God, and the behavior that harms people, that is sourced in our hearts, so if what offends God is what offends people, and what offends people comes from our hearts, then we need to guard our hearts. In other words, according to Jesus, our behavior will eventually mirror our hearts, and our hearts will eventually show up in our behavior, but our behavior eventually mirrors our hearts, and what's in our hearts eventually flows out into our behavior.

Now, the interesting thing is, you already know this. You may not have thought of it in these terms, but you've seen this. You've seen this in your life. You've seen this in the lives of other people, right? Do you know anybody that blew up a career, because of what came outta here? Do you know anybody that burned down a marriage with their tongue? Do you know anybody that alienated their children because of how they behaved in the home? And some of these very people, in fact, some of us are some of those very people, aren't we? And we look back, and think, "What was that? Who was I? Where in the world did that come from?"

So, as we wrap up this series, I wanna spend our last few minutes talking about four emotions that should ding your conscience, that when you think these thoughts, or feel these feelings, when you think these thoughts, or feel these feelings, when your mind starts to go down this trail, it should bother you. It should be a... It should light up your conscience. It should remind you, or it should inform you that you have some work to do, because if you do not deal with what's on the inside, it eventually makes its way to the outside, and not only do you hurt you, and not only do you hurt, perhaps, the people you love the most, it's offensive to God. And it's not offensive to God, because He's so sensitive, and so emotional. It's offensive to God, because God loves the people you hurt and God loves you. And when you love someone, you don't wanna see them hurt themselves. And when you love someone, you don't want them to be hurt by someone else. These should tip you off. You can think of it in this way, these are like internal tensions that deserve, in fact, I think they demand our attention.

So here they are, four emotions, guardrails for the heart: Guilt, anger, greed, and jealousy. Guilt, anger, greed, and jealousy. Guilt, anger, greed, and jealousy. When you identify these, 'cause greed, you don't even feel, but you may identify it. When you feel it or identify it, you have work to do. There is something in you that has the potential to create chaos outside of you. And our tendency, our tendency is to wait until we've said something, to wait until we've done something. That's like putting the guardrail in the danger zone. We wanna put the guardrail in the safety zone, which means we start paying attention as soon as there is an internal tension.

Guilt says, "I owe you." I owe you an apology. I owe you something, because I took something from you, and you don't know about it, or maybe you do, but I'm too proud to admit it." Guilt says, "I owe you." It leads to walls, inauthenticity, dishonesty. Guilt leads to secret keeping. It leads to creating distance. "What's wrong?" "Nothing." "What's wrong?" "Nothing." "What's wrong?" "Nothing." "What's wrong?" "Nothing." "How long are you gonna do this?" "The rest of our marriage." "What's wrong?" "Nothing." "What's wrong?" "Nothing." "What's wrong?" "Nothing." "Well, there's something wrong. I don't wanna tell you, because I'm carrying something." And it seeps into our words, and it makes its way into our relationships.

Anger says, "You owe me." because you hurt me, you took something from me. You either pay me back or I pay you back." Now, the problem with anger, and we all know this, is that anger leaks. Anger is not stationary. Anger is mobile. Anger leaks into our other relationships. Another way of saying it, is that anger is never isolated to the relation of origin. In other words, you were hurt as a kid. You were hurt in that last job. You were hurt by that last girl. You were hurt when he broke up, and the way he broke up, and the way you found out, and you're carrying that anger. But anger says that "you owe me and until you pay me back, I'm gonna hold this over you. And I'm gonna hold it over anyone who reminds me of you. And long after you're out of my life, I'm still gonna hold other people hostage the way you took from me."

Greed says "I owe me." It's what we talked about last week. What is greed? Greed is the assumption that it is all for my consumption. That's right. Greed is the assumption that it is all for my consumption, so greed is, "I owe me and I know you're in need, and I know there's these people that are struggling, and I know that the church has asked, and I know that the folks at work are raising money for, and as much as my heart goes out to them, my money does not. And oh yeah, it's heartbreaking but when it comes to actually writing that check, when it comes to actually giving that money, there's something, I just, I can't justify it. It becomes a filter for all of our decisions.

Do you know what else happens with greed? Men, if we're not careful, because we like stuff, men, the people in our families, the people closest to us will feel like they're competing with our stuff. They'll feel like the car is actually more important than her or him. That making sure that stays, buttoned up and tightened up, and locked up and insured. "Don't go in there, I'm gonna let you look, but kids don't touch." After a while, listen, when your children feel like they're competing with your stuff, you have a greed problem. You do. You say, "No, I just like nice stuff." No, when you like nice stuff more than you like your children or you like other people, that's an issue. That should bother you.

Jealousy, "Life owes me." Somebody got what I deserve. She got who I deserve. He got what I deserve. Life owes me." And now you don't like him. And now it's almost impossible to be nice to them. You know what else happens with jealousy? This is the ickiest, ickiest, ickiest thing and when this rises up in me, I mean I just speak it out loud because I think it is the worst, grossest. I don't know another word I can use in public. This is the most messed-up stuff I can think of is when I find myself secretly celebrating someone else's loss or failure. Is there anything worse than that? Is there anything lower than that? If that is in you and if that is in me that should set off alarm bells in our conscience because it will eventually leak. So, when you feel it, when you see it, you gotta address it. When you feel it, when you see it, when you notice it, when somebody else notices it in you, and of course you say, "Oh, No. No. No. No. No..." , but then you walk away going, "Oh, yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes..." , I think yes in fact I can't even admit it, I'm so embarrassed by it. You gotta address it.

Now, I'm gonna give you some suggestions over here in this third column, but before I do, just going to say this real quick, if you're not a Christian, I have and you already know this, but I just wanna make sure you know that I know. I have no right in the world to tell you what to do and just because Jesus said something doesn't mean you're obligated to do it. You've never signed on and said Jesus follower, so I get that, but let me just say one more thing if you're not a Christian or you're coming back or you're considering it.

What we're about to talk about in the next five and a half minutes is why following Jesus will make your life better and it will make you better at life even if you haven't come to the point and never come to the point that you can acknowledge that Jesus is who Jesus claimed he was. Following Jesus the way we're about to talk about... This is why we say following Jesus makes your life better and will make you better at life. It will make you a better husband or wife

or boyfriend or girlfriend or just friend or employee or employer. It'll just make you a better person. That's why Jesus's invitation was, "Follow me. Follow me. Follow me." And I'm gonna ask you to do things that don't necessarily make any sense emotionally, but at the end of the day, at the end of the decision, you will experience a freedom and a peace that perhaps you've never ever experienced before.

These are four preventative, in a way, heart exercises to keep you out of a ditch, to keep you from going outside the rails. And as I said, they are precisely the opposite of what we feel like doing or want to do. So what do we do with our guilt? These are just four words, Is we confess. And not to God. Up here. He already knows. [laughter] When you confess to God, God doesn't go "What? Hey, hey, hey, somebody, come here. You're not keeping me up to date. What's going on? What? I had no idea But this is what you were raised to do. You were raised, and come on, you were either raised to tell someone you barely know and never see in your real life or you were told to tell God. The confession that heals and the confession that deals with guilt has to do with confession to somebody who is in your life, and ultimately to confess to the person you hurt, and that you stole something from.

And it will damage your reputation, that's what guardrails do, minimal damage. It will hopefully temporarily maybe damage your marriage, or your relationship with your fiance or your boyfriend, but if it's temporary then it's minimal damage, that's the nature of a guard rail. It's minimal damage. But the longer you carry that guilt, the longer it eats you up inside and it's gonna drive you to other behaviors that eventually you're gonna either have to confess or somebody's gonna find out. Come on, secrets suck the life out of you, and secrets suck the passion and the life out of a relationship. If you're God and you loved you the way God loves you what do you think you would say? You would say, "Come on, let's get rid of that. I want you to confess." And yeah you're gonna have to swallow your pride but come on your pride is why you did what you did to begin with.

Confess it. And if you don't think you're ready to confess to the person you actually hurt because that's too big of a step then I would beg you to confess it to someone who is in your life, a trusted friend, somebody in your group, somebody at work, somebody that they're not a counselor, they're not gonna try to fix it for you. But you need to get it out, and when you get it out and can look at it, chances are you'll take that next step and eventually you will confess to the person that you hurt. And when you do, look up here this is important, there will be a measure of chaos out here, but there will be a level and a measure of peace in here. And this will eventually dissipate and this will eventually be something you worked through but you will have set yourself up for future success by simply doing the difficult work of confessing.

Anger, we already know the answer to this. It's forgive. Do you know what forgiveness is? Forgiveness is identifying specifically what was taken from me, and deciding you don't owe me anymore. It's not enough to say I had a terrible dad or I had a terrible mom or my boss okay they were terrible, granted, but what did they take from you? What specifically was taken from you? You've got to identify specifically what was taken from you and then you have to look at it and say "I'm making a decision; you don't owe me this anymore. I'm cancelling the debt." That's what forgiveness is. It's cancelling a debt to which we say "I feel like I'm letting 'em off." You are, that's why I feel so bad, but you're letting somebody else off as well. You, because you're digging up all of this out of your heart and you're saying "I will not be ruled by this anymore, it's not gonna follow me into my next relationship. It's not gonna follow me into my next marriage. It's not gonna impact the way I discipline my kids. I'm done. I have decided you don't owe me, you are forgiven."

And what do we do about greed? We give. We give. We write some big to-you checks. Do you know what a big to you check is? It's a check that's big to you. It may not be big to me, may not be big to the person behind you but to you it's a big check. It may be a huge check compared to me but to you it's just a big check. You write some big to-you checks. You decide, "You know what, greed, you're not controlling anymore. Watch this, I'm writing a check and I'm giving it to this non-profit and they didn't even ask. Ha ha ha! You don't control me anymore."

If you wanna get serious find something precious, an object not a child, okay. Find something, not someone, not someone, a something, not a someone, a something. You find something precious like "don't touch that, don't go in there, don't get your hands on that. You know we keep it behind glass," and you sell it. And you give the money away.

And you go "Aha! These objects will not control me anymore. I'm not about stuff that somebody else is gonna have to sell." And I'm not against having stuff and I'm not against collecting stuff but when it becomes the priority over people, you have a greed problem. And you can't continue to be consumed by what isn't even yours to consume. Christians don't trust in riches. We trust in Him who richly provides.

And jealousy, we said that "life owes me." But if you wanna deal with jealousy, you've gotta be willing to admit what the real problem is. And it's not that life owes you. At the end of the day if you're honest, you believe God owes you. This is an issue not between you and your sister-in-law, because she married well or because she has something or because she whatever it was you wanted now she has it or your brother-in-law or your roommate cause she's kinda moving on with her life and you feel like you're in a cul-de-sac. It really has nothing to do with them. It has to do with what you think God owes you that God didn't give you. Because the truth is, see, life happens but God takes what happens and makes things happen when we receive what comes our way from his hands. And ask him to do with it whatever he pleases.

The way you respond to jealousy is you begin to celebrate. You begin to celebrate what God has given you and you begin to celebrate what God has given others. You begin to celebrate what God has given you and you begin to celebrate out loud. "Dear, Frank, congratulations on the promotion. As you know, I was really hoping to get it but I am genuinely happy for you. Love." and then put in an envelope and you say "Jealousy, you do not live in my heart any longer. I'm genuinely happy". For you say, "Oh, I don't feel it". It doesn't matter if you feel it. You are going to behave your way past these things that have the potential, come on, to pollute our heart and pollute our soul. Who has what you think you deserve? You need to figure out a way to celebrate them out loud.

Now for some of you, you need to do a little bit of some mirror work. You know what I mean? A mirror work it is when you look in the mirror and you start talking to these things. "Guilt, guilt, you're not living in my heart anymore. I'm gonna be... I'm confessing. Anger, you're not gonna live in my heart anymore. I'm forgiving. Watch this, I'm gonna forgive, in fact I'm even gonna write a list of all the things that were taken from me and put on an envelope, decide they don't owe me anymore 'cause anger you're not going to live in my heart anymore. I'm not carting you around from relationship to relationship to relationship to relationship. And greed I'm gonna write some big checks, okay? Greed, I'm going to be almost unhealthily generous until I can become a cheerful giver."

'Cause, see, some of you think you've got to be cheerful before you give. That's not true. You give till you become cheerful. If you have to wait till you're cheerful, come on, you're never gonna give because the cheerfulness of giving is the response to what happens when God opens your hands in your heart and you realize, you know what? I'm actually happier and I have more peace without it than I did clinging to it, protecting it, cleaning it, and insuring it. There's gonna be so much cheer that follows.

If there's something... Every time, in fact it's hard to even listen today 'cause there's something that just comes front and center and just churns in your gut. Is everything okay in your heart? Clinging to anything that you know you have hurt some people's feelings over stuff. Have you recently, even in your heart, celebrated somebody else's failure? Celebrated the fact that life didn't work out for them the way you know they hoped it would work out for them. If so, that's dangerous. Because if it's in there, it's gonna come out of there and it will defile you with God. Not because God is squeamish, because God loves you and loves the people that your words and actions have the potential to hurt. So, above all else, above all else, above all else, guard your heart for everything you do flows from it.

Guardrails-Pt4

Laughter

Andy Sitting

Andy at/addressing plasma

What's on the plasma