



LESSON 1 // GUARD YOUR HEART

Warning messages and signals are an important part of life. We all encounter these persistently online, in our cars, on labels, in announcements and in various other forms.

These warnings are guardrails that guide us on a safe pathway. To ignore or dismiss a legitimate warning or established guardrails is foolish. It's risky and potentially self-destructive. Perhaps you've heard or said at times, "If only I had paid attention to the warning!"

In Jesus' teachings, we often see Him warning us about dangerous twists and turns that can potentially drain spiritual power and effectiveness from our lives. He knows that we need guardrails to keep us on track as we navigate the challenges of following Him.

At the same time, these warnings also instruct and encourage us. They point us in the right direction along safe roads that provide the best opportunities to keep moving forward. They help us maintain spiritual strength and power.

In Luke 12:1-34 Jesus provides clear guardrails for us as His disciples. Notice the first of His warnings in this passage:

Luke 12:1-3 (NIV) *Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ² There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ³ What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs."*

What do we learn from these verses that can provide a guardrail for our lives?

1. Guard against hypocrisy in your life.

Wherever Jesus went during His earthly ministry, crowds eventually assembled. These crowds usually consisted of His twelve Apostles, other disciples, curious seekers and people in need. Almost always there were also those who stirred up trouble against Jesus. Notice how Luke describes this as he sets the context for Jesus' teaching in chapter 12:

Luke 11:53-54 (NIV) *When Jesus went outside, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, ⁵⁴ waiting to catch him in something he might say.*

Because His disciples had observed the attitudes and antagonism of the Pharisees, Jesus wanted to warn them about the potential of allowing the same spirit to infect them: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees."

This yeast is clearly identified as “hypocrisy”—pretending to be one thing when you are really something else. Hypocrisy involves a hidden agenda that is less than honorable toward God and others. It’s like wearing a mask to try to fool people by an outward appearance that does not represent your real self. It deceives others while also deceiving yourself!

Jesus wants to work in our hearts to close the gap between our public presentation and private reality. He calls us to guard against the deception of hypocrisy so we can live in truthfulness and integrity for His purposes.

2. Know that the real you will be revealed.

Jesus declares that there’s nothing “hidden that will not be made known.” What we really are in the private aspects of our lives—that we may think is “hidden”—will eventually be revealed.

This revelation may happen in this life, or in the life to come, but it will happen. We are accountable for our thoughts, actions and words and this is part of the guardrail God has put in place for us.

3. Build strong private character.

Why does Jesus place such importance on the private, hidden areas of our lives? Because compromise in these areas diminishes our relationship with Him and with others, as well as our public power and influence.

Private, personal victory leads to public victory. If we establish genuine patterns of purity, habits of holiness in the most personal and private dimensions of our lives, we will have the spiritual power to experience victories in the times of public testing.

Building strong private character is the antidote to hypocrisy. Out of a desire to please God, we need to guard our hearts and only allow what is godly and good to prevail there. This will make a difference in every aspect of who we are and how we live.

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

Discussion questions

1. Read Luke 12:1. What is hypocrisy? In what practical ways can you guard against hypocrisy in your heart?
2. Read Luke 12:2-3. What difference should it make in your life to know that “the real you will be revealed” and nothing is “hidden that will not be made known”?
3. What are some disciplines you can consistently practice to build strong private character? What steps can you take to begin implementing these in your daily life?