



KEY TAKEAWAY: If you don't work on your heart, it will work against you.

KEY SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 17:9; Proverbs 4:23; Psalm 139:23–24; Galatians 5:19–21, 22–23

[**Author Note:** Before the message, fill a mason jar with water, and put a single white flower into it. When you do the illustration in “Welcome to Mishmar,” grab the food coloring, and as you talk about each deadly prisoner, drop a different color. This illustrates how each different drop pollutes the quality of the water and will ultimately change the flower from the inside out.]

INTRO

How many of you have been in a relationship that you regret to this day? Maybe you never even dated the person, but you made an attempt, and it failed miserably. That's the funny thing about relationships; you never really know if the person you're about to date is going to be “The One” or if they're going to be that crazy person you talk about for the rest of your life.

But there is an adrenaline rush that comes from trying to find someone to date. Can I be a downer for a second? When you date someone, you are going to get your heart smashed to pieces. You're not going to walk away without any scars, because the dating game is actually a battlefield littered with casualties and heartache. Why else would Cupid shoot arrows? Do you really think it tickles when you get shot in the face by an arrow? OK, that last line was ridiculous, but you get my point.

The biggest enemy on the battlefield isn't even the people you date. God identifies that traitor like this:

Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)

The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?

P.S. If you want to break up with someone, tell them that. God is brutal when He tells us that our own hearts are wicked. But let's entertain that thought for a moment.

Remember that time you were supposed to do your homework, but your heart whispered, “One more episode of *Riverdale*, you need to know what happens next ...”? Or remember when your mom told you to clean your room, and your heart reminded you of all the empty space under your bed? It was the perfect place to store all your dirty clothes and trash.

Let’s get real—your heart kinda sucks. It’s out to get you. The end. But not really. The issue is that God designed your heart to do good. You were made to reflect the same qualities that God has, but something went wrong when that whole sin stuff entered the picture.

Before you ever date someone, you need to understand that your heart is going to be working in overdrive to sabotage what God wants to do in you. So before you work up the nerve to make a prom-posal, I propose we work on your heart. Because, if you don’t work on your heart, it will work against you.

Welcome to Mishmar

Like I mentioned earlier, your heart was intended for good things, not evil. But something went wrong. Your heart used to be like a river that gave life, but now it’s like a holding cell of the soul’s worst criminals.

That’s why the author of Proverbs says this:

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

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

I like that phrase “guard your heart.” In Hebrew, that phrase is called “*mishmar*.” *Mishmar* is a terrible name for a daughter, but it’s an accurate description of what’s happening internally. *Mishmar* means to guard something like a prison guard keeping watch over a prisoner. If someone comes to visit with a suspicious-looking cake, *mishmar* will step in and stop the prison escape. Good Ol’ *Mishmar*.

But we need to identify two problems with this picture. Number one: the prisoner isn’t trying to escape your heart. The goal of the prisoner is to pollute that river of life as much as possible, by sneaking past *mishmar*.

Problem number 2: there isn't just one prisoner. There are multiple prisoners. Paul identifies at least 15 of them:

Galatians 5:19–21 (ESV)

“... sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, divisions, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these.”

Can you see how these prisoners can easily dismantle the healthiest of relationships? This is the world's deadliest prison riot, and it's living in your heart. You're gonna need some more *mishmar* if you want your heart to survive. If you don't work on your heart, it will work against you. The problem with these prisoners is they won't attack from the outside. They destroy you from the inside out, and given enough time, you will see their attacks appear on the outside.

[[Author Note: Reference the flower in the mason jar here.](#)]

And if you really want your heart to be something that gives life rather than being your worst enemy, then you'll have to pray something drastic and dangerous.

THE MOST DANGEROUS PRAYER

Believe it or not, the world's most dangerous prayer isn't the kind that sends you to Antarctica to spread the gospel to penguins. The most dangerous prayer to our culture is this:

Pslam 139:23–24 (ESV)

*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*

We don't even like our parents having access to our Snapchat, but this guy is inviting the Creator of the universe to run a full diagnostic on his heart. We're talking about the God who knows how many hairs are on your head, and who can probably create a list of everything wrong in your heart.

Let's be real—if God handed you an envelope that contained everything you're doing wrong, would you open it and read it? Or would you hide it

away, hoping no one ever saw it? Yet, this guy is asking God to search his heart, test his thought life, and see every sin he’s committed.

But in the final verse, he says something crucial to all of this: “Lead me in the way everlasting.” He doesn’t want God to only identify the prisoners in his heart. He wants God to lead him to a way that gives life. He’s telling God to identify the wrong path he’s been living on and to point him to the right one.

If we want to overcome the prisoners that are looking to wreck our lives and ruin our future relationships, we need to be willing to ask God to search our hearts. But more importantly, we need to ask God to lead us. Remember *mishmar*, the lovable prison guard? Turns out he has backup, and his buddies are willing to fight the prisoners in your heart and lead you to everlasting life.

ONE FRUIT

Paul clues us in on the backup that God designed for our hearts. Our hearts alone couldn’t stand up to the riot of sin, so He gives us a new heart. This heart is packed with the necessary guards to lead us to everlasting life and back to giving us life. He names these guards like this:

Galatians 5:22–23 (ESV)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

In order for God to search our hearts, He has to identify what’s going wrong. He also wants to show us the right path inside our hearts, because that’s where He wants to lead us. So examine each of these attributes and ask if it’s missing. When we examine each quality, we see what we need to become whole.

LOVE – Have you been willing to sacrifice for the people around you? Are you willing to lay down your ego for the sake of other people coming first?

JOY – Are you constantly comparing yourself to others? Do you notice your lack before seeing what you have?

PEACE – Do you feel rested, or are you constantly anxious?

PATIENCE – Are you always in a hurry?

KINDNESS – Do you consider others first? Are you compassionate?

GOODNESS – Are you confident in your standing with God? Do you see yourself as follower of Jesus and not just a fan?

FAITHFULNESS – Do you trust in the promise of God over your own fears?

GENTLENESS – Is your anger louder than your love?

SELF-CONTROL – Is your heart controlling your actions?

When we can answer these questions honestly, we can start allowing God to search us and lead us into everlasting life. But this is not a buffet. You don't get to pick and choose which one you like most. This is the fruit of the Spirit; not the fruits. All of these must be in sync to create a healthy heart.

That's what purity is. It's not just a word that describes if you're sleeping around or staying a virgin. “Purity” is a word that describes the quality of your heart, and when one of these qualities becomes weak, it lets the prison riot in our heart become out of control.

We're going to talk about that more in the coming weeks, but I want to leave you with this. Are you willing to do what it takes to control the prison riot? Will you let *mishmar* take control so that God can lead you into the life everlasting? The most dangerous prayer isn't, “Send me.” It's, “Search me.” But when we make that decision to allow God to search us, it leads us into something amazing. But you have to make that decision for yourself.

[**Author Note:** Save the flower in the water for week 2. Let students see how the flower has changed colors. This shows how the flower was changed from the inside out.]