

Guard the Gates - Part 1

Early on in my days as an RN, I greatly enjoyed working with patients who had come through multiple trauma situations. Even when I was in nursing school, I would frequently spend my evenings at work as a patient care tech, in the Emergency Department or in the Surgical Intensive Care Unit. The reason was because these areas were generally the hubs for patients who had multiple trauma insults to contend with. Then when I graduated from nursing school, I went to work in the SICU and it was there that I found a niche specifically with neuro-trauma and the other injuries associated with the brain and the spinal cord.

There have been numerous times that I have seen patients that hardly had a mark on their body but had been dealt a massive blow to the head to the extent that they never recovered. In fact, far more than I would like to have liked, we would send them to long-term care facilities basically in a very obtunded or comatose state. Never again would they function normally and be able to assume even the most basic of daily functions of living. A perfectly healthy body but with horrific brain injury that disabled them.

John Bunyan wrote another classic besides Pilgrim's Progress. It was a book called The Holy War. The focus of the story was the capture of a city called Mansoul. In it Diabolus (the devil) has taken it and the battle rages as the Prince Emmanuel works to recapture it. The way it was overcome was because the gates of the city had been compromised. Diabolus and his wicked imps had traversed it by taking advantage of the Eye Gate and Ear Gate which are symbolic of the use of the senses to cause the capture of the city.

It is imperative that a minister guards the gates of his mind. He is constantly under the assault and duress of the devil and because of this, our mind must be worked on very diligently to prevent the capture of it. Don't be surprised at the tares, which may loom among the wheat because this is the way it has to be. In fact Paul cautioned the ever-vigilant servant when he expressed the fact that there must be heresies to grow like clover in a pasture. The reason is for the church to be approved by God (1 Cor.

11:19).

So over the next several days, I am going to give some specific things that will help those involved in the everyday work of the ministry to guard their gates. You will soon discover that there are certain habits that cater toward strengthening your character. Because of our role as a leader it is of utmost importance that we have a bent toward personal godliness. It cannot be an ordinary godliness but it has to be something that is motivated by a hunger for God and desire to do His work.

The real fact of the matter is that our society and the churches we serve have a certain level of expectation toward our own personal godliness and level of holiness. One of the chief things we can do to benefit our church is to have an increased level of prayer, grasp of Scripture, and purity of mind. For this to come to life in our churches there are some things that we MUST do! Yet this expectation they have of us is actually a good thing because our calling should produce this in our hearts. I am always taken aback by men who are in the ministry but appear to be more in step with the world than with God. We cannot afford to be worldly and unspiritual men! Every day is an opportunity for me to grasp the plow that is working the ground of the Kingdom of God and never look back.

Recently my name was drawn in a random drawing and I was able to go to a John Maxwell leadership seminar for the day. I haven't attended a Maxwell seminar for well over a decade, however, I can honestly say that he is a gifted and talented communicator. In the course of that day, he mentioned that all men need to do is identify the Big Five that they will do every day. He said, tongue-in-cheek, that every day meant holidays, birthdays, and weekends. His Big Five that he does every day is:

- 1. Read**
- 2. Think**
- 3. File**
- 4. Ask**
- 5. Write**

He said it took him about seven years to come up with the Big Five but once he did, great benefits have come out of it. With that analogy in mind, I thought that there are five things that a minister or anyone who desires to have a deeper relationship with God ought to do every day. In no particular order, here are some things to help you guard your mind.

A man has to study. We are very much molded by the books we read and things we study. What a man does in the study will have a great impact on what happens in the public arena of ministry. If he is weak in the study, he will be weak in pulpit. To be absorbed in God's Book will create a sincerity and personal sanctification that will go a long way in making him effective. Furthermore the sanctifying work that goes on in his soul will have a cleansing effect on the people to whom he is called to minister to.

Persevering study will improve the heart. A man who does not have a high regard for his own personal library and neglects the Word and the books that helps him to gather nectar to make honey will soon have an empty soul. There is something that happens to a man who will give himself to the constant, steady, and disciplined study of the Word. There are great elements of truth that will march through his mind. The Scriptures will preserve the soul against the vain imaginations that ruined men in Romans 1.

Truth is a sobering matter, a heavy matter that provides great support for a preacher's soul. If the mind of a preacher is going to be something, then it has to do something in the area of stretching. More often than not, Scripture will speak very clearly to issues that present themselves in the common areas of pastoral ministry. Be it far from me to give them my opinion when I can tell them what God has to say about the matter. But to know what God has to say about the matter, I have to know what He said about it in his Word. Can I implore you to stop looking for and even giving "words" or "revelations" that are not based on what God's written word has to say?! Men who are given to study and a great familiarity with the Word can see through these scandalous words.

However to be an effective student of the Scripture there will be a

requirement of disciplined time management. My time is at my disposal and if I do not carefully guard it and plan what happens to it, at the end of the day very little return is gotten from those precious minutes. While it cannot be an all encompassing statement there is much truth to be understood that some of God's holiest men were those men who were students of His Word. When you read of some of the old preachers in the bygone era, you will discover that they were men who spent long days and sometimes even their nights in study.

The benefits of the study are the glorious, inspiring, convicting and life-changing sermons that will be born in the heart of that man who gives himself to guarding the gates by studying. There will be nuggets of truth that will be expressed in counseling sessions that you will wonder where they came from only to remember later that those thoughts came to life in the study. There will be a depth that comes to prayer and you will find yourself praying things out of the soul that you will wonder where you learned that vocabulary of prayer only to discover later that these things were because of the labor and sweat of the study.

Study involves several things in itself. It involves a mental seriousness of the task you are undertaking. Consider the seriousness of a medical researcher who is pouring over solutions, equations, and experiments in his pursuit for a cure for cancer. Can our discipline be any less serious than the researcher?

Study also involves a devotion to good books. Our age has drastically changed and the way we work with information is constantly evolving. However, I have to confess that despite the wizardry and power of the iPad, there is still nothing like taking a bound volume of paper and retrieving it and then marking in the margins and underlining things that stand out to us. I have discovered the value of some books may be just a single sentence or paragraph that sets your soul of fire! Books cost money and you can look at it either as an expense or as an investment. I feel sure that some preachers spend more on their hunting rigs or Harley's than they do on their personal libraries.

Study also involves the development of a mind given to meditation. This is

an art to work toward crafting. A godly imagination can open up a biblical character as never before. Case in point, think of Jael hammering a nail through the temple of Sisera and then think of Jacob's reeling mind as he was about to meet Esau for the first time in twenty-years.

I would encourage taking the evening and going and just browsing about your own personal library and seeing what is there. You might be surprised at some of the hidden gifts that God has waiting for you on the shelves.

Furthermore, it is going to help you guard the gates.