

Today I want to help resolve a mystery for you today.

- How is it that 2 people can get married and swear at the altar that they are going to love each other forever...and then 5 years later they HATE each other more than anyone else on the planet? It's WEIRD, isn't it?!
I can understand hating a serial killer, tyrant, terrorist – Hitler or Osama Bin Laden. But people think about their EX and they get filled with HATRED and RAGE!
- Think about this – why is Domestic Violence – 2 words that should never be together!
Domestic– I love you, you love me, we have kids together, family, home, hearts and kisses...Love.
Violence– I want to hurt you - beating people up, abuse, anger.
I mean if your going to be violent go hurt someone who needs to be hurt. I mean... I didn't say that did I??? Why do these two words come together?
- Consider this: Two people are about to divorce and they say something like well we just don't love each other anymore. But they would both be willing to fall in love again...with someone else! What about INSTEAD if you just fall in love...WITH EACH OTHER AGAIN! Less complicated and expensive!

And they'd say, "It's not that simple." And they'd be right. It's not that simple. Today we'll see why it's NOT that simple and what God wants to say and do to help us deal with these issues.

REVIEW:We've been asking, **Is it possible for two people to stay happy together forever?** And even if I said NO, something inside each of us says, "YES! I can beat the odds." That is the thumbprint of God on us. Because, (let me say this emphatically) it can be done.

And we've learned that we need to **MAKE LOVE...A VERB.** This is a process of mutual submission and Jesus is our model.
We are RE-MODELING our lives around His example and treating the other person in our lives like he/she is the most important person in the room.

Now maybe you've gone through the first two weeks and thought, "Been there, tried that...not that simple." And your right, it's not that simple. And that is what I want us to talk about today.

It would be that simple though if it were not for one thing ... SIN. We could have GREAT relationships if we had hearts very full and very healthy, and with great role models in the past.

1. Dad was always there at every game and recital.

2. Mom never missed an activity.
 3. They always held hands and giggled.
 4. They always poured into you the best things.
 5. They taught you how to resolve conflict well.
 6. Your Best friends never hurt you.
 7. You never had anything bad ever happen to you, and you were never mistreated or abused.
 8. No one ever took advantage of you.
- Life would be GREAT if you came into your relationship that way and so did the love of your life!

But most of us don't have that kind of background do we? WE HAVE BAGGAGE! We come into relationships with seriously hurting hearts! And often we think that this person is perfect for me because they make me forget about "that stuff."

ILLUS: Let me introduce Mr. and Mrs. MUG. They met right after college, and it was love at first sight.

She saw him and he had a degree and a future and he saw her and I mean wow look at her she's a knock out. And all that's working for her.

They started dating and when they were dating they were so careful – because he's trying to win her heart and she's trying to win his affection. They had a few little bumps along the way but nothing they couldn't handle.

They were just SO careful. And then they got married, then about a month or two into the marriage they had a (crash) problem. They hit a bump. And stuff came out!

And he looked at her and said, whoo were did all that come from?

And she looked at him and said well I didn't know you had anger issues. Well I didn't have anger issues until you bumped me (CRASH) OH there it is again.

And then they had another problem. (CRASH) And then she went to see her sister and she said "I didn't know he was like that"

and He went to see... We don't know who guys go to see ... Maybe he looked in the mirror. And said... Wow, she makes me so mad.

Whenever she brings that up I get so (crash) mad and if she would quit bumping me like that then I wouldn't be so mad... My wife - she has issues.

He says to her when we were dating I didn't see all that stuff, where did all that come from. And she says well whenever we (crash) get into an argument you make me act that way.

Now here is what I want you to see.

MR MUG thinks the reason the blue beads come out of him is because they keep having conflict and she keeps bumping him.

And MRS Mug thinks the reason the pink beads keep coming out of her is because they keep having problems and he keeps bumping her.

But here's the truth the reason **blue beads come out of MR MUG is because that's what's in there. (Pause, got it, look)**
And the reason pink beads come out of MRS Mug is (are you writing this down?) because that's what's in there.

All of us have "STUFF" in us and we don't know what is inside us until we get bumped. We all have issues. (Turn to the person next to you and say You've got issues..... Now turn o the and say I have issues too) And most of us don't get our first really hard bump until we get into a committed, long-term relationship where we have vowed to work it out no matter what. There is something about that kind of a relationship that brings out the best and brings out the worst of who we are.

Most of us don't know what is really in there until we get into this kind of a relationship and this is why people can make a promise to one another that till death do us part and then get so mad and angry and frustrated with that other person.

Because he is absolutely positively sure that the reason the blue beads come out of him is because she get's on his nerves and she keeps saying that thing and pushing his buttons. But the truth is the blue beads keep coming out is because that's what's in there.

And she's absolutely sure that If he would stop; and he would start; and he would quit; and he would do more of; and he would do less of; and he would be careful... then the pink beads would quit coming out. But the truth of the matter is they keep coming out because that's what's in there.

All of us have stuff in there... and all of us blame the person we're most in love with for what comes out of us. But the reason it comes out of us is because it is in us. But it's relationships that bring it out of us like nothing else. (I won't ask you to raise you hands if you know what I am talking about.)

So what do we do? Well the answer is pretty simple. But it is something most of us don't do. **We have to pay attention to what is going on inside us.** Look at what the Bible has to say:

Proverbs 4:23, "Above all else..."

- In other words, **what I am about to tell you is as important** or maybe more important than anything else I have ever had to say.

"...Guard your heart." In other words, **pay attention to what is going on in your heart.** The **"heart"** in the Jewish culture is the **seat of the emotions.** And the writer of Proverbs says "guard" – pay attention to, keep the bad stuff out, protect and defend...your heart! Most of us have no idea how we would do this and yet the writer of Proverbs tells us it is **one of the most important things we should do!**

And what many of us have found out is that what's inside of us is what comes out in the relationships that are most important to us. We may have blamed it on another person but we soon discover when we get into another relationship with another person, strangely enough blue beads keep coming out of us. 4 relationships later and blue beads keep coming out of us. And we think man, am I bad a picking relationships? I keep picking people who have the same issues over and over again and I need to find someone who does not have these issues so that stuff doesn't come out. And we never realize that the blue beads come out because that is what is in us.

Now let me tell you what we are really good at when it comes to this. We are not really good at guarding our heart but we are really good at monitoring the other person's behavior. **Were great at monitoring behavior but we stink at Monitoring and guarding our hearts.**

BOTH are really important. Let me see if I can show you how they are connected. Everyone of us wants to feel a certain way. You want to feel **loved, competent, respected, cherished, valued, taken care of.** You may not have made a list of these types of things but we all desire them. **Your significant other, their words and actions, elicited a certain feeling in you.**

So when you try and get them to do some thing, or stop doing something, **Often times (even though we don't make this connection)** it's because **we don't like the way those words or actions make us feel what is inside us,** Instead we want them to do and say things that make us feel a certain way, because after all **we were drawn into this relationship primarily because of emotion.** We Fell in Love. We Love the way they made us feel. We loved the experience of

when we “fell in love”. **And it is normal for us to want to keep that emotion alive.** So we monitor that person's behavior trying to get them to do and say those things that make us feel a certain way and stop doing or saying things that draw out those negative emotions in us.

There is a **problem** – **we come to depend on our spouse to create those feelings for us.** I am depending on you to make me feel valued, respected or loved. And all this goes on in the background of the relationship. This is all normal. And if we all came in with a heart full of all of only good stuff, that might work out but we don't and it doesn't because we come in with all this baggage on the inside. And what's on the inside eventually makes it's way to the outside of us. And when that stuff comes out of us we tend to blame the other person that brought it out of us, but it is our stuff that is in us to begin with.

Now here's the secret. **Your ability to feel certain things is determined on the condition of your heart!** For example, If you come from a background where you grew up in a home where you **did not feel appreciated and valued,** You will have a hard time feeling appreciated and valued by your spouse. No matter how hard they try and how much energy they put into it, you may never feel it is enough. It will be harder for you to sustain a level where you feel appreciated.

Your ability to feel certain things is a reflection of, not only of your spouse's behavior but also the condition of your heart

Which means **your ability to stay in love, has as much to do with the condition of your heart as it does the behavior of your partner.**

And both are vitally important, but we naturally monitor their behavior, we don't naturally monitor our heart. So when the blue beads come out we naturally blame the other person, but the truth is we brought much of that stuff in with us. Without an understanding of what we are talking about today, no amount of commitment, can compensate for this dynamic. You may stay together, but you will not stay in love. Or you may just say forget it and run. Your ability to stay in love has a lot to do with their behavior but it also has a lot to do with the condition of your hearts.

Lets look at how Solomon finishes out this verse. **“Guard your heart, for it determines the course of your life.”** Hello? Are you tracking with me?

Everything in your life is affected by the condition of your heart. When you are in a relationship, your relationship is an overflow of what is in your heart.

What's in you will come out of you regardless of who's with you!

You can change the people around all you want but the result will be the same. So it is important for us, those who want to stay in love for forever to monitor our heart.

Now, Andy Stanley, who BTW inspired this series. Has written a book that is called "It came from within" that actually deal with the subject of guarding your heart, and I can honestly say it would be a good read for anyone struggling in this area. But today I want to give you some practical steps to start you on the path of how to guard your heart and resolve some of the conflicts you might encounter.

Again we are all experts on how to monitor others behavior... I don't think we need to do a sermon series on that one do we? :) But the whole idea of paying attention and deal with what is on the inside of us is new to many of us.

I guarantee you that if you do these simple steps you will see a marked improvement in your ability to "Stay in Love" Ready?

There are 4 steps to this exercise and you need to write these down. Now we all know the old adage think before you speak. Well that is in the Proverbs as well Proverb 13:3, 16:23 talk about controlling and teaching our mouths to speak when appropriate.

So here is what I want you to do, and this is the hardest part.

Step #1 Stop! - Stop and pray.

Before you respond and say something that you know you are going to regret give God a chance to speak to you. **James 1:19 You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.**

Invite God into the discussion on your side. If this is the only step you take you will see a marked difference in your conflicts, but you still will not have done all the work that God wants you to do when it comes to Guarding your heart.

Step #2 Identify - Identify what you are feeling

Ask God to reveal what it is that you are feeling. Now guys let me just say something to you. I know how this works for us.

We say "well I'm just frustrated"

what are you feeling

"frustrated"

what else?

That's just it, frustrated.

Then we go "well I'm not angry."

Well maybe a little angry but mostly just frustrated... then maybe a little angry.

Well guys is that your only two emotions? Pretty much! I mean don't get me wrong we experience good emotions happy and stuff like that but when it come to negative emotions we have just about two. Frustrated and angry. right?

Guys I want to work with you a little bit. This is easier for ladies, and we blame it on the fact that they are more emotional. But that is not true. In fact guys **I would argue that we are so emotional and scared of our emotions that we just "Well I'm just frustrated"... that's as deep as we want to go.**

I want to increase our vocabulary. Here are some other emotions you may have.

The goal of this exercise is to identify the exact emotion you are feeling. There is a great power in this. Remember Solomon says above all else you need to do this.

Anger, Left out, Embarrassed, Unappreciated, Ugly, Unlovable, Failure, Old, Stupid, Lonely, Abandoned, scared, Out of control, betrayed, picked on, Jealous, disrespected, insecure, hurt.

GRAB A BEAD. I want you to identify this emotion. I want you to put a name to it. I feel ... Now were getting somewhere! You see his is part of guarding your heart, You have to know what is in you. You have to identify it. **You see emotions like these, when kept secret are powerful. They drive you,** what you say and what you do. They drive you into a funk and you clam up and don't say anything and develop bitterness, or they drive you to say things you know you shouldn't and to come out and vomit all over the person you love the most and then you can't take it back and you harm that person.

But if you begin to unearth them, and **put a name to them** they begin, (now this is not the end), but **they begin to lose their power.** And let me tell you what starts to happen you begin to look at that thing and you begin to see that what they said was not meant to make me feel bad... **I think this is a ME issue.** I think this is a Rodney bead, this a Billy bead, or this is a Susie bead. This is a ME bead. I think I got to own this one. In fact, I think I might owe her and apology.

Why is it that his success makes me feel like such a failure? I need to figure that one out! **A lot of times much of what you feel (not all of the times) but**

often what you feel is what you brought into the relationship. It has very little to do with that other person sitting across from you. Their words or actions just surfaced something that was already inside of you. **There is huge freedom when you begin to separate what they said from what you feel.** But as long as it is a secret it will run your life, and potentially drive a wedge deeper and deeper between the one you have committed to live and love for the rest of your life. You got to name it. **Say it out loud!**

Guys this is hard... we don't want to do this. And ladies you too, we know that as soon as we say it, it will lose some of its power. But you know why because **we are going to loose our excuse!** Because, **I kind of want to stay mad.** I want to use my anger or my pouting to control your behavior. But now that I know what I am dealing with I kinda loose my excuse.

Step #3 – Confess it

Confess it to God. Remember, he knows what is in you. But there is great freedom in telling Him and agreeing with Him on what you are learning is in you. The honest truth is that only He has the power to change what is in you. Scripture tells us that **Ezekiel 36:26 NLT And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.**

The work of changing our hearts and dealing with all that baggage is a work that you can do only with God's help. **He wants to heal your heart.** He wants to help you live a life that is full of love. Surrender those emotions to Him and let Him change it.

Then when it is appropriate, tell your partner. Confess it to them. **James 5:16 NLT Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.**

This can be one of the greatest things you can do to Stay in Love. Let me show you what that conversation might look like.

MR MUG says to MRS MUG. I have discovered something about my self. Whenever you say those things to me, I FEEL ... _____. **Now I know what you are going to say. Great that's going to create another argument.** But here is what I want to tell you. There are no bad feelings. **I did this recently with my wife and I saw the tension begin to rise because she thought I was attacking her. I had to slow it down and say. "I don't want this to become and argument I just want to communicate what I have been**

feeling.” If you will approach it with out letting that emotion drive it, this will work. You see there are no bad feelings. They are just feelings. So when someone you love says when you do this or say this, it makes me feel this way. That is not a criticism of you. That's just an observation. And if that makes you get all defensive and insecure... and “well you shouldn't have done **“hold on that's a pink bead problem”**. When someone opens up to you in that way, that is just information. **So you know what the proper response should be? “I'm so glad you told me...** And then the most important part. (ZIP IT)” Let's all practice that... that's the hardest part isn't it.

Not **“well you shouldn't feel that way.”(crash)** or here's another one **“I'm sorry you feel that way”** ... a good response is “thank you for sharing with me” Let me tell you healthy people (now this is a mirror for you) When they discover something that they do or say draws out negative emotions form the one they love. When they discover that, healthy people quit doing it. They don't say, **“well you'll just have to deal with it.” You should grow up, be more mature. They quit doing it.**

Step #4– Now I know this might be hard for some of you, especially if you are with someone who is not a strong believer. But I think it is essential to seeing that kind of growth. **Ask to pray together about it.** Now don't go and pray God will you help her stop ... Pray for your stuff. Pray, “God, I don't want to feel this way about the gift that you have given me.” Pray that God takes those feelings from you and that you begin to feel your heart be healed in this area.

This is the strategy for guarding your heart. And as Solomon and Jesus tell us. “Above all else, guard your heart. For everything you do flow out of it.” Can you try that with me this week?

4 Simple steps... Stop and pray, Identify it, Confess it (to God and your spouse), Pray together.

Well let's do that right now bow your head and close your eyes just for a moment.

Dear God, Your word is so practical. If we will only apply your word you tell us we can “stay in love” God help us to put these things into practice in our lives this week. Help us practice guarding our hearts. Amen.

Now maybe you're here today and you say Pastor Rod that sounds great but you don't know what is in my heart. Your right, I don't but Jesus does. Maybe today you need to turn your heart over to him, so He can give you a new heart. Maybe today you realize you have never invited Jesus into your heart. Friends let me tell you 2000 years ago on a cross Jesus paid the cost for

what is in your heart. He died to pay the penalty for all your sin. He just asks that you give your heart to him. Let him do that work today. In Eph 3:17 it says "Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong."

If you would like to do that today, you can simply say this prayer with me. Just say it from your heart. Dear Jesus, I need you to come into my heart and change me. I accept what you have done for me and I confess I need you in my life. Jesus will you come into my heart make me new. Change my heart. I ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen

Now, If you did that today, I don't want to embarrass you or call you out but I would love to acknowledge and pray over you. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. Would you just raise your hand so I can Pray for you?

Ok how about you Christian? Do you need to do some work with God today? Do you need to admit and confess what has been going on in your heart?

Connection Card

- I have asked Jesus to be my forgiver and leader this week.
- I will confess and ask for forgiveness to my loved one this week
- I will commit to praying with my loved one this week
- I will examine and guard my heart this week.