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NEWSLETTER



AIR NATIONAL GUARD PHOTO BY TECH. SGT. DEIRDRE SALVAS

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DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

The wonder of  
**OUR GOD**

by CH (LTC) Steven Hokana  
USA (Ret.)

“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my

thoughts than your thoughts”  
(Is. 55:6-9).

Many times, I have been present when someone dies. It hurts. Seeing those who you love called from this life, regardless of circumstances, is difficult to take in. Emotions run high. There are lots of tears. When someone falls asleep in Jesus, it is sad. But it’s not the last or final chapter of their life. They rest with Jesus. Forgiven by His death on the cross, they are no longer in pain, no longer submit to suffering or experience loss. In the early 20th century we used to speak of death in rather enigmatic terms. “Yes, they

departed this mortal coil, they passed on.” It is rather humorous trying to picture death as a rusty unwound spring — still can’t figure that one out. Death is not a passing. There are only two options: life with Jesus or eternity in hell.

Often at funerals or at time of a loved one’s death, you may hear a minister or funeral director console the family with words from Isaiah:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than

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U.S. MARINE CORPS PHOTO BY LANCE CPL. CHASE W. DRAYER

# GUARD YOUR HEART!



My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings.

Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart.

For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh.

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

**Prov. 4:20-23**

by CH (LTC) Steven Hokana  
USA (Ret.)

A while ago I was stationed at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. I was assigned two wards, one of which was called SICU, Surgical Intensive Care Unit. This was an ultra-modern wing of the hospital. It's very clean. Lots of monitors and plenty of activity. Doctors and nurses moving about from the main station, which looks like NASA's mission control center.

I was about to conduct my visitations. Bible and small stole in hand, I sauntered toward the rooms. A stern voice in the darkness told me, not yelling, in a very professional tone, "Stop. Look down." There was a blue line of tape across the floor. I stopped. The nurse told me to come back in a couple of hours. I did. The lights were bright on the floor, nurses and doctors were doing what they do ... coming in and out of the patients' rooms. I found the nurse who had roused me out of the intensive care ward. He told me it was an unusual day. Three rooms on the other side of the blue line were absolutely sequestered and protected. These three patients had — his phrase and not mine — "fresh hearts." He went on to tell me, "We protect fresh

hearts in every way we can. No one goes in until the heart can push back and fight infections, diseases and stresses." When it was determined I was no longer a threat, I could then conduct ministry and provide care.

I was struck by how those serving on this floor were the guardians of hearts. They wanted these fresh hearts pure! Everyone concerned desired a clean heart. As such, they did not want something that would take root in the heart: a bacterium, virus, a common cold or a disease to take hold of the heart, leading to death.

The heart, like all things, belongs to God. It has a purpose and intent. The heart described in Proverbs is more than a four-chambered muscle pumping blood and giving life. No, in this case the heart is that special place where the central core of our thoughts, words and actions resides.

The Holy Spirit, through Solomon, tells us to be attentive to what He says: "hold the teachings tight to your heart." Solomon then goes on to say we are to "keep" our heart with vigilance ... because from it "flow the springs of life."

For the child of God in Christ this begins when we are called by the Holy Spirit to faith in Baptism. Guard the heart! Protect it! Value what's in its chambers and give thanks to God that as He redeems our life, He redeems

the heart. This is not a Bible passage discussing the virtues of our living, of our lifestyle, or of what we can do to cooperate with God in bringing about salvation. This passage has a strong echo of Ps. 4:6-7:

There are many who say, "Who will show us some good?

Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord!"

You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

The heart is transformed, not replaced but redeemed. Once a horrible leaky vessel exuding darkness and death, now made a receptacle for the goodness and mercy of Jesus by grace through faith.

Without the redemptive work of Christ on the cross, our hearts would be weak, broken and useless.

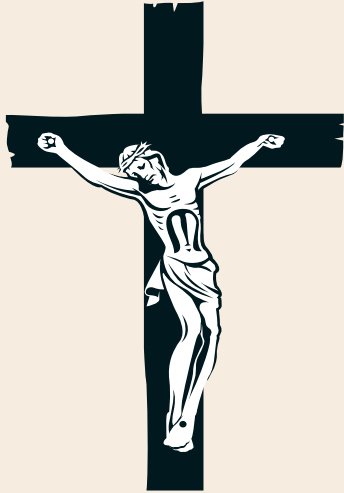
Solomon points to Christ, and this is not about us! In our nature we are hostile and against God. We are now transformed.

Our heart is now a quiet restful bed. A place of great joy. A cradle for Christ:

Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,  
Make thee a bed, soft, undefiled  
Within our hearts, that they may be  
All quiet chambers kept for thee.  
Our hearts for very joy do leap,  
Our lips no more can silence keep;  
We, too, must sing with joyful tongue  
That sweetest ancient cradle song.

(LSB 358)

We have a heart transformed and redeemed. Guard it through God's Word and promises. Be a steward and protect it. Be a vigilant nurse of your heart, renewed by Christ.



**WITHOUT THE REDEPTIVE WORK OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS, OUR HEARTS WOULD BE WEAK, BROKEN AND USELESS.**



U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO BY JOHNNY SALDIVAR

## Keeping vigilance

Satan delights when a child of God goes "sideways" in their life. Follow the words of Solomon: "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov. 4:23).

Here are four ways you can "keep vigilance" over your heart by way of hymns and Holy Scripture:



### Call to mind your Baptism.

"God's Own Child, I Gladly Say it" (LSB 594) echoes 1 Peter 3:18-22.



### Devotions are a way to stay in

**God's Word.** "Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word" (LSB 655) is a prayer tethering our heart to God's Word. This points to Ps. 119:5-10.



### Have friends who share the hope

**grounded in Jesus.** "Good Christian Friends, Rejoice and Sing" (LSB 475) expresses the joy of like-minded men and women recorded in Col. 3:13.



**Go to chapel.** Join in worship, participate in the Sacrament with fellow Lutherans. Make it a discipline. You are not alone. "Blessed Jesus, at Your Word" (LSB 904) calls to mind Heb. 10:25.

"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov. 4: 23).



**"He who sings, prays twice." Martin Luther**



U.S. NAVY PHOTO BY PETTY OFFICER 2ND CLASS JAN DAVID DE LUNA MERCADO

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your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Quoting this passage to a grieving child, wife, father or mother would be absolutely incorrect and wrong. The words are absolutely true, but it would not be unlike applying a Philips screwdriver to a flathead. It’s wrong for the occasion. Although Isaiah 55:9 sounds “churchy” and uppity,” the context is all wrong. Consider what you are saying in the context of losing a loved one to death. Do you really intend to imply God is not consoling with love? Where is the ever-important reminder of Christ and His suffering, death and resurrection from the grave? When citing Isaiah 55 without context, it sounds like they are to be permanently placed in a mud pit of despair. “Stay hurt! Continue to just keep your nose to the grindstone and maybe perhaps someday you might be at peace, but certainly not at a point of understanding.”

No, this is a passage that resonates and echoes through the entire Bible. The whole book of Jonah concerns repentance. The ministry of Peter and Paul is one of repentance and forgiveness, and Jesus Himself as He launches His ministry begins with repentance:

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (MATT. 4:17).

Repentance is mentioned 75 times in the Bible.

God loves us and desires to forgive us and return us to Him. The Lord is speaking through Isaiah, and tells us how much God loves you. This is a great mystery! We can’t fully understand it. We are not prepared at a moment’s notice to forgive those who offend us, love those who hate us, have compassion on those who insult and minimize us ... but God is. He does this by sending His Son, Jesus, to hang on a cross in fulfillment of His promise. It is that one singular act where we see the Lord in action: hanging on a cross, redeeming the world, and pouring out His blood for the forgiveness of your sins.

It is true, “my thoughts are not your thoughts and my ways not your ways.” They are better! Wiser, and wonderful.

When confronted by death, injured by its terrible sting, think of the wonder of God. Despite who we are, He loves us so dearly. We don’t have to understand it, we can never fully can wrap our minds around it. But through the Holy Spirit we accept it and stand in the light of forgiveness. So, bask in the future joy of living with Jesus in the New Jerusalem forever. Thank God His ways are not our ways and His thoughts not ours. They are better, wonderous, and carry us to life everlasting.

# CHECK IT OUT!

**WORSHIP AND DEVOTIONS**  
[worshipanew.org](http://worshipanew.org)

**MILITARY ONE SOURCE**  
[militaryonesource.mil](http://militaryonesource.mil)

**VETERANS CRISIS LINE**  
[veteranscrisisline.net](http://veteranscrisisline.net)

**WARRIORS OF FAITH**  
[thelc.ms/lhm-warriors](http://thelc.ms/lhm-warriors)

**FORGIVENESS IS A CHOICE**  
[shoplhm.org/forgiveness-is-a-choice](http://shoplhm.org/forgiveness-is-a-choice)

**PTSD THE WAR AT HOME**  
[shoplhm.org/the-conflict-at-home-soldiers-confronting-ptsd](http://shoplhm.org/the-conflict-at-home-soldiers-confronting-ptsd)

**VICTIM, VALIDATED, VICTORIOUS**  
[shoplhm.org/victim-validated-victorious](http://shoplhm.org/victim-validated-victorious)

**STRENGTH AND HONOR**  
[shoplhm.org/strength-and-honor-the-spiritual-warfare-against-pornography](http://shoplhm.org/strength-and-honor-the-spiritual-warfare-against-pornography)



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