

Alertness

vs. Carelessness

Alertness is exercising my physical and spiritual senses to recognize the dangers that could diminish the resources entrusted to me.

Definition

Alertness presupposes dangers that threaten to diminish or destroy the resources God has entrusted to us and that we must exercise extreme care in protecting these resources. The Biblical words *beware* and *vigilance* explain the concept of alertness.

- **Beware**—Three Greek words are translated *beware* and each defines a different intensity of alertness. *Blepo* means “to perceive or observe.” *Phulasso* conveys the idea of a sentry who is carefully guarding those put under his care lest they escape. The third word, *prosecho*, means “to give attention to, be cautious about, to devote thought to.”
- **Vigilance**—*Gregoreuo* means “to take heed lest through remission and indolence some destructive calamity suddenly overtake one.” A church leader must be sober and vigilant. (See I Peter 5:8.)

What to Beware of:

- “Beware [*prosecho*] of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matthew 7:15).
- “Beware [*prosecho*] ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1).
- “Take heed, and beware [*phulasso*] of covetousness: for a

man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15).

- “Beware [*blepo*] lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8).
- “Beware [*blepo*] of dogs [men with evil minds], beware of evil workers” (Philippians 3:2).
- “Beware [*phulasso*] lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness” (II Peter 3:17).

What Must We Protect?

- **Our time:** Time is a valuable asset that attracts many robbers. (See Ephesians 5:16.)
- **Our health:** Energy and vitality will be dissipated through immoral living. (See Proverbs 5:11.)
- **Our purity:** Evil men and women prey upon the unsuspecting and defile the strength and wealth of their purity. (See Proverbs 5:10, 6:26.)
- **Our fellowship with God:** “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God” (Isaiah 59:2).
- **Our family and friends:** Beware of whisperers, for they separate chief friends. (See Proverbs 16:28.)
- **Our good name:** “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour



Alertness is the awareness that we are being stalked by a deadly enemy. (See I Peter 5:8.)

Lions hunt in groups called prides. While part of the pride hides in the grass and blocks the escape route of the intended victim, other lions frighten the prey, driving it into the path of the concealed hunters. Those who are truly alert recognize both obvious and hidden dangers. (See James 4:7.)

“Set a strong guard about thy outward senses: these are Satan’s landing places, especially the eye and the ear.” —William Gurnall

When did flattery disarm a king and cause him to lose all the treasures of his kingdom? (See II Kings 20:12–18.)

“The price of freedom is eternal vigilance.” —Thomas Jefferson



The **ring-necked pheasant** survives by fleeing the attacks of predators. It can easily detect approaching danger through its keen senses of sight and hearing.



Time is a limited resource that is extended only by giving the first part back to God.

“Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” —Ephesians 5:16

“I have ever found it, when I have thought the battle was over and the conquest gained, and so let down my watch, the enemy had risen up and done me the greatest injury.”

—David Brainerd

rather than silver and gold” (Proverbs 22:1).

- **Our money and possessions:** “A gracious woman retaineth honour: and strong men retain riches” (Proverbs 11:16).
- **Our eternal rewards:** “Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Revelation 3:11).

What Is the Basis of Alertness?

Every physical sense has a corresponding spiritual sense. Through our physical senses we can be alert to the physical world, and through our spiritual senses we are able to understand the spiritual world. A mature believer is one who exercises all his senses to discern between good and evil. (See Hebrews 5:14.)

Physical Senses and Corresponding Spiritual Senses

Sight

Spiritual sight: “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psalm 119:18).

Hearing

Spiritual hearing: “Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing” (Hebrews 5:11).

Taste

Spiritual taste: “O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him” (Psalm 34:8).

Touch

Spiritual touch: “Which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life” (I John 1:1).

Smell

Spiritual smell: “We are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life” (II Corinthians 2:16).

How Can We Develop Greater Alertness?

1. Recognize that we are in perpetual warfare.

Since Satan’s fall, evil has warred against good and Satan has aimed to kill, steal, and destroy Godly generations and the foundations of righteousness. (See John 10:10.)

Scripture urges us to be “good soldiers” of Jesus Christ (see II Timothy 2:3). A soldier gives up his personal desires and comforts for the sake of the cause for which he is fighting. As believers, we also are to forsake worldly pleasures so that we can fight the good fight of faith. (See I Timothy 6:12.)

2. Realize that our enemy is a master of deception.

Jesus warned that Satan is a liar and the father of lies (see John 8:44). The Apostle Paul pointed out that Satan is able to disguise himself as an angel of light. “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light” (II Corinthians 11:13–14).

3. Ask God for spiritual understanding.

When Solomon became king, he asked God for keen spiritual senses: “Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad” (I Kings 3:9).

Paul prayed that the believers in Ephesus would be aware of their position in Christ and thus live victoriously. “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1:18).

4. Understand that life involves cause-and-effect sequences.

Alertness is motivated by the realization that actions have predictable results and that the laws of the harvest apply to all levels of life. Scripture warns us to not be deceived. Whatever we sow, we will also reap. (See Galatians 6:8–9.) We reap *what* we sow, we reap *where* we sow, we reap *more* than we sow, and we reap in a different *season* than we sow.

5. Have a Biblical response to each danger.

- **Be alert to resist**—Our first line of resistance must be to check every thought that comes to our minds. Satan can put evil thoughts into our minds as he did with Peter (see Mark 8:33) and with Ananias and Sapphira (see Acts 5:3). As soon as we recognize that a thought is not from God, we should resist it and bring it into captivity to the obedience of Jesus Christ (see II Corinthians 10:4–5). “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).
- **Be alert to avoid**—Danger can come from association with the

wrong people and wrong ideas. Paul wrote, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Romans 16:17). “Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes” (II Timothy 2:23). “Avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain” (Titus 3:9).

- **Be alert to escape**—When we recognize temptation, we are promised that there is also a way to escape, if we are alert to recognize it. “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (I Corinthians 10:13).
- **Be alert to flee**—Joseph was alert to the danger when confronted with the evil request of Potiphar’s wife, and consequently he fled. Similarly, we are instructed to flee youthful lusts and situations that would lead to fornication. (See II Timothy 2:22, I Corinthians 6:18.)



*B*e Vigilant!

During certain periods of history, a prison guard’s life depended on his ability to exercise vigilance. If the prisoner escaped, the guard was put to death. Thus, the Philippian jailer drew his sword to kill himself when he thought that Paul and Silas had escaped. (See Acts 16:27.)

“A thief can steal in a moment, but the watchman must watch all night. Sin can undo in an unguarded second the character which required years to form.”

—C. H. Spurgeon

Personal Evaluation

How alert are you to danger?

- Do you daily remind yourself that you are in a spiritual war?
- Do you diligently guard your time from detractors?
- Do you confirm with Scripture everything you are taught?
- Do you guard your daily time with the Lord and His Word?
- Do you reject all whisperers and talebearers?
- Do you protect your good name by doing only what is right?
- Do you ask God for daily guidance and find His will?