Alertness in Scripture

The Character of God

- God’s name “El Roi” means “The God Who Sees.” (See Genesis 16:13.)
- God is aware and alert all the time. (See Proverbs 15:3.)
- God is observant and responsive to our needs. (See Matthew 6:8.)
- Jesus was alert to men’s motives and responded with wise, careful answers when they tried to ensnare Him in His words. (See Mark 12:13–17; Luke 20:1–8.)
- The Holy Spirit is alert to what God speaks and then speaks that to us. (See John 16:13.)

Picture of Alertness

A man chosen to climb a tower and watch for an enemy approaching the city was called the “watchman.” Imagine the weight of responsibility that rested on the watchman’s shoulders. He had to be alert to notice an advancing enemy and warn the city so that they could prepare for battle. He would be held responsible for the lives of the citizens if he did not warn them. (See Ezekiel 33:1–9.)

Habakkuk 2:1 speaks of the prophet watching from his tower, alert to hear what the Lord would say.

In Jeremiah 6:17, Israel is an example of a city that foolishly ignores the watchman’s warning.

Isaiah 62:6 calls the prophets of Jerusalem “watchmen,” since they were to be alert day and night for the spiritual welfare of Jerusalem.

Alertness in My Life

- Proverbs 22:3—How can you demonstrate alertness according to this verse?
- Matthew 24:42 and Luke 12:37—Jesus taught that there was a specific thing about which we are to be alert: What is it, and how can we be obedient to this instruction?
- Mark 14:38—What danger do we avoid if we are alert in prayer?

Key Concepts

Know the meaning of Alertness. Alertness is being aware of that which is taking place around me so I can have the right response to it. An alert person notices if something does not seem right or is out of place, and is consciously aware of the spirit of the place that he is in. We can be alert by looking both ways when we approach a street or road and also notice what is happening around us in a parking lot. We must discern when to use electronics such as cell phones, earbuds, etc., because, if used at the wrong time, they can make us oblivious to our surroundings and cause us to miss important things that are happening. Ask God to make you alert and guide you in the right response to every situation. (See Psalm 143:8–9.)

Recognize the spiritual battle. I Peter 5:8 says to be sober and vigilant because our adversary the devil is trying to destroy us. We must be saturated in the truth if we want to be able to notice, combat, and overcome his deadly, debilitating deception. (See John 8:32.) Adam and Eve were not alert, and they failed to recognize Satan’s attack when he presented an idea that was not in agreement with God’s Word. (See Genesis 3:1–8.) Being aware of Satan’s tactics will help us be alert to subtle, little ways he attacks, trying to defeat us by convincing us to doubt God and His Word.
Alertness Memory Verse

Mark 14:38
“Watch ye and pray,
lest ye enter into temptation.
The spirit truly is ready,
but the flesh is weak.”

Memory Verse Game: Warm or Cold
Choose a child to be “It” first. Have him close his eyes while the rest of the children agree on a spot to hide an object, such as an eraser or a water bottle. “It” opens his eyes and begins to search for the object. The other children give him hints by quoting the verse softly or loudly depending on where “It” is in relation to the hidden object. Read to the children: As “It” looks for the object, we are going to help him by quoting the verse softly when he is far away from the object (cold) and loudly when he is closer to the object (warm). Give different children the opportunity to be “It” until the children have quoted the verse often enough that they have it memorized.

Doers of the Word
Have the children write about a time they were able to apply this verse in their lives. For example: “I finally had a chance to enjoy some time alone in my room. I was having a great time. All of a sudden I heard my brother scream outside. I was tempted to ignore it because he was probably just playing and someone else would probably check on him. I really wanted to keep doing what I was doing, but then remembered this verse and prayed that God would help me even though I felt weak. He did and so I ran to check on my brother. I found him hanging with his leg stuck between the slide and a board on the swing set! I was so glad I checked on him and I did not ignore his scream.”
Alertness in the Life of Paul’s Nephew

Read Acts 23:12–24 as a family and answer the following questions:

1. What were the Jews planning to do? “And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul” (Acts 23:12). Have you ever known of someone who wanted to do harm to you or someone else?

2. Did the authorities know about the plot of these wicked men? “And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul” (Acts 23:14). What should you do if you are made aware of an ungodly plan?

3. Who was alert to overhear the evil plan? “And when Paul’s sister’s son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul” (Acts 23:16). Why is it good for young people to talk to adults about what they see going on?

4. What happened after Paul’s nephew wisely reported what he overheard? “Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him” (Acts 23:17). How have you seen God work after you rightly responded to a dangerous situation?

5. What details of the plan did Paul’s nephew remember to tell the chief captain? “And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul tomorrow into the counsel, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee” (Acts 23:20–21). When could sharing details help authorities take proper action?

6. What did the chief captain say to Paul’s nephew? “So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me” (Acts 23:22). How do police, emergency workers, pastors, and especially parents, help people avoid danger?

7. What was the result of the alertness and right response of Paul’s nephew? “And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor” (Acts 23:23–24). How can you be alert to what is happening around you?
Alertness is being aware of that which is taking place around me so I can have the right response to it.

Paul's Nephew Warns of Danger

“And when Paul's sister’s son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul” (Acts 23:16).
Alertness Craft

“Keep Watch” Tower

Introduction:
Read to the children: “This month we are asking the Lord to develop alertness in our lives. What a privilege to respond to the work He is doing to change us into the image of His Son! Today we are going to make watch towers as a reminder to be alert to what is going on around us. This helps us prepare for what is coming and avoid temptation. God is the source of alertness, and as we listen for His voice, He will build alertness into our lives.”

Supplies:
Brown construction paper, markers, scissors, googly eyes, glue, and tape.

Craft Instructions:
Instruct the children to draw the top of a tower across the long edge of a piece of brown construction paper and cut along the line. Allow them to decorate the paper to look like a tower made of bricks, wood, or stone.

Give each child two googly eyes to glue on the paper and write the words “Keep Watch” next to them. Tape the short edges of the paper together to make a cylindrical tower.

Read to the children: “When you see your tower, remember to stay alert to what is going on around you and ask God to show you how He would like you to respond.”
Alertness Activity

What Do You Notice?

Practice alertness by finding seven differences between picture 1 and picture 2.

Picture 1

Picture 2
Boom! A few of the fighting men froze, staring upward as another charge-filled cannonball soared across the battlefield. The deafening explosion as the bomb landed bewildered, wounded, or killed those in the targeted vicinity. The accuracy of the enemy cannoneers was improving with each shot. They had successfully pinpointed their opponent’s position.

The alert commander, following each movement of the enemy while simultaneously tracking the positions of friendly regiments, knew the time to attack was now. “Forward, men!” he shouted above the din. Held high for his men to see, his silver sword gleamed in the blinding sunlight, leading them on toward the enemy. His men bravely surged forward in a line formation, rifles at the ready, all eyes on their leader.

Onward pressed the standard-bearer; onward pressed the ragged line of soldiers. Yet despite the soldiers’ bravery, the outcome of the battle still hung precariously in the balance.

Suddenly, the balance tipped! The enemy was scrambling, retreating, abandoning their fortifications. Excited, inspirited cries burst forth from the weary attackers! With renewed vigor the prevailing offensive force furiously plowed forward, fully convinced that victory was theirs!

In 1869, a few short years after the end of the American Civil War, William F. Sherwin penned a hymn which, with its military tone, undoubtedly stirred the spirits and memories of many former soldiers. Sherwin was born in 1826 in Massachusetts. As a young man he studied under the famous prolific composer, Lowell Mason. Sherwin worked at the New England Conservatory of Music and was also a voice instructor and large-group music director. He was known for his hymn writing. “Sound the Battle Cry” is one of his works.

This particular hymn, however, went beyond appealing to those with military ties. In “Sound the Battle Cry,” Sherwin focused on the spiritual battle every Christian faces and the need to be “on the offensive” for Christ, not shrinking back into comfortable, cozy spiritual lethargy.

Sound the battle cry!
See, the foe is nigh;
Raise the standard high for the Lord;
Gird your armor on,
Stand firm every one;
Rest your cause upon His holy Word.

Sherwin used the Apostle Paul’s description of the Christian’s spiritual combat in Ephesians 6 as he penned this hymn. Notice the parallels between the words of the hymn and Paul’s exhortation:

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall
be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:10–17).

These verses emphasize the importance of alertness: being aware of that which is taking place around me so that I can have the right response. Are we strong in the Lord? Are we putting on the whole armor of God? Are we standing against the wiles of the devil? Or are we spiritually “taking it easy,” unaware of the spiritual dangers that are lurking on every side? If you were in a battle would you ignore the advancing army?

Sherwin’s life illustrates alertness. He could have chosen an easy life, blending in and ignoring the spiritual battle of his day. However, Sherwin chose differently. His musical training was utilized in a vibrant, out-reaching movement that met yearly at the beautiful Lake Chautauqua (shuh-TAW-kwuh) near Jamestown, New York. His extraordinary talent in organizing and leading amateur choruses paved the way for his being selected to serve as the first music director at the Chautauqua Assembly camp meetings. His adroit conducting brought beautiful music out of the enthusiastic but untrained thousands who attended. People gathered to hear the finest speakers and musicians and were inspired to seek Christ and live for Him. These popular meetings had a great influence for many years, and though much smaller now, the Chautauqua Institution still lives on at its New York site. At its peak, this movement also sponsored concerts and lectures throughout the United States, and Theodore Roosevelt called it “the most American thing in America.” God had placed William Sherwin in the Chautauqua Movement as part of his “fighting the good fight” for Christ, and Sherwin responded appropriately since he was well-aware of the spiritual battle of the time.

Strong to meet the foe,
Marching on we go,
While our cause we know, must prevail;
Shield and banner bright,
Gleaming in the light,
Battling for the right we ne’er can fail.

Rouse, then, soldiers, rally round the banner,
Ready, steady, pass the word along;
Onward, forward, shout aloud, “Hosanna!”
Christ is Captain of the mighty throng.

Thousands upon thousands of people’s hearts since the Civil War have been stirred and inspired to “fight for the Lord” by this simple hymn. Will you take up its challenge and do the same?

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses” (I Timothy 6:12).

Bibliography:
Sound the Battle Cry

Words and Music by William F. Sherwin (1826–1888)

1. Sound the battle cry! See! the foe is nigh! Raise the standard high For the Lord:
   Gird your armor on, Stand firm every one; Rest your cause upon His holy Word.
   Rouse, then, soldiers! Rally round the banner! Read-y, stead-y, Pass the word a-long;
   On-ward, for-ward, Shout a-loud, ho-san-na! Christ is Cap-tain Of the might-y throng!

2. Strong to meet the foe, Marching on we go, While our cause we know, Must pre-vail;
   Shield and banner bright Glean-ing in the light; Bat-ting for the right, We ne'er can fail.

3. O Thou God of all, Hear us when we call, Help us one and all By Thy grace;
   When the battle's done, And the victory's won, May we wear the crown Be-fore Thy face.