

***Watch Your Life:
The Believer's Guide to Thinking, Speaking and Acting Confidently in a Belief-
Challenged World***

Pastor W. Eric Croomes Ministries

Second Edition 2023

All rights reserved. ©2023PWECMINISTRIES
No part of this document shall be reproduced, distributed, or otherwise copied without the expressed and authorized consent of
PWECMINISTRIES.

WATCH YOUR LIFE

PASTOR W. ERIC CROOMES



PASTOR W. ERIC CROOMES MINISTRIES

FORT WORTH

PHOENIX

CONTENTS

Overview:	
Watch Your Life	1
The Watch Principle	5
Watch Your Doctrine	6
Your Doctrine is Your Life	8
Watch Your Self	9
Watch Yourself: The Heart Continuum	11
Power Thoughts! Power Words! Power Actions!	15
Watch Over and Watch Out for Others	17
Watch Those Dogs!	20
The Top Five Negative Conditioning Sources	21
How to Write a Personal Belief Statement	24
Summary	26

Watch Your Life:
The Believer's Guide to Thinking, Speaking and Acting Confidently in a Belief-Challenged World

Vision

Creating a sustainable and flourishing spiritual life.

Objective

To help the believer understand and embrace the importance of correct doctrine for effective Christian ministry and to become familiar with the multi-dimensional ways in which correct doctrine governs our covenant relationship with God and with one another.

Takeaway

How correct doctrine buffers the believer from potential disastrous effects.

Theme

Your doctrine is your life. Your life is your doctrine.

Watch your doctrine and life closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

(1 Timothy 4:16)

Introduction

<p>Watch your thoughts.</p> <p>Watch your words.</p> <p>Watch your actions.</p>
--

How do believers stay faithful to our covenant relationship with God and one another in the middle of a culture chock-full of change, complexity and challenge, a culture marked by a fast-paced lifestyle, “to-go” lattes matched only by “to-go” belief systems? How do we sustain our spiritual growth and prevent our paths from meeting with the catastrophic spiritual effects of living in a pluralistic world where truth is traded on a religious market exchange and where traders buy low and sell high? How do we avoid running on empty when those around us are self-identifying as religious “none” or “spiritual not religious” at astonishing rates?

Here is the answer: Watch your thoughts. Watch your words. Watch your actions (or lack thereof). This is essentially what Paul is saying to Timothy and what we will bullet point toward in this short instructional booklet. We will first exegete the text, 1 Timothy 4:16, within the context of the early church, and break down what Paul’s essential message to Timothy is. Then we will apply the spiritual principles to our modern lives and seek ways to strengthen our belief. Finally, we will conclude with some practical tips on applying the principles to everyday encounters and we will also design a personal belief statement, too!

Key Terms

When the Bible talks about *life*, its focal point is the *heart*. The heart is the seat of our emotions. It governs our thoughts, our motives, and our actions. When David exclaims, “*Create in me a clean heart, Oh God*” (Psalm 51:10), he is asking God to rewire his motives and the source of his actions. A new heart is a new motivation, and a new motivation is a new life. A new life is based on what we believe. What we believe is intimately connected to the teaching (doctrine) which we receive and impart.

Paul is sounding the alarm to Timothy about guarding his spiritual life as signs were mounting of a great apostasy or abandonment of the Christian faith. The verbs Paul employs are imperative and issue commands. “Take heed”, for example, means to *pay attention to*, with further connotations to *hold upon* or *retain*. I particularly like another variation: *detain*, which is to ‘arrest’ anything suspicious, whether it be teaching, ways of thinking or acting, as it relates to Christian character.

The term *watch* (NIV) is to *look at* or *observe attentively* over a period; exercise care, caution, or restraint and presupposes a deeper meaning toward an act or instance of carefully observing someone or something over a period of time. A similar verb appears in 2 John with the meaning to perceive, discern, to look.

Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.

2 John 1:8

Overview

The Apostle Paul takes up the “watch” theme with Timothy and he does so with a sense of urgency throughout both of his letters. He writes to Timothy personally, pastorally, and prophetically. Paul does not want Timothy to lose everything he has gained in Christ!

The early church was under attack on two fronts: persecution from without, heresy from within. It was the internal decay which most worried Paul; he knew that bad doctrine and teaching would undermine and eventually kill the church much swifter than the sword of the Roman republic.

At the heart of Paul’s admonition is the sanctification of the early church, or the *action of making or declaring something holy or set apart for special use*. Exercising discernment would be the key to keeping the faith pure. Sanctification is guided by three principles: positional, progressive, and perfect. Our positional sanctification means that our redemption is grounded “in Christ” (I

Corinthians 1:30). Our progressive sanctification considers that we still sin, but our inward walk in Christ is the effect of obedience to God’s word. In other words, we grow in Christ (II Peter 3:18). Lastly, our perfect sanctification means that our life in Christ is sealed or complete and is our ground for glorification (I Thessalonians 5:23).

Paul urges to Timothy to “watch” or “guard” his doctrine and his life as well as those for whom he had been given charge. Why? Because Paul understood the importance of a “rule” of life not just for Timothy, but for the believers under his charge. Our struggle is to maintain confidence in Christ!

Why Doctrine and Life Are So Inextricably Woven

Our doctrine, or what we believe, becomes our “rule” of life.

Our doctrine, or what we believe, becomes our “rule” of life, the standard by which we measure our faith amid a post-modern, fast-paced world. So, as believers, we should be constantly asking ‘In a world chock full of the three Cs – change, complexity, challenge – how may I live up to the likeness of Christ and *think, speak* and *act* like a shining beacon of His glory?’

Employing a rule of life is to watch your life closely and is expressed holistically as soul care, spiritual maturity, mental wellbeing, intellectual vibrancy, and physical health. God’s word is the heartbeat of this expression and thus guards against the intrusive and daily effects of pandemic recovery, grief and loss, financial setback and the wider realities of pluralism and global uncertainty.

What we believe will keep us focused on the big picture and give us incentive to run straight toward the goal as we affirm daily the blessings of God in and for our lives. Correct teaching allows us to address struggles, recognize sin patterns and find grace in difficult moments of change, complexity, and challenge.

What the Bible Says About Watching

The command to watch, guard, or to function as sentry is woven metaphorically throughout Scripture.

Its first mention is in the Garden of Eden where Adam’s initial post-creation duty is to work and to “keep” the garden:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Genesis 2:15

“Keep” implies not only the tilling of soil, but the shepherding or guarding of the garden against intrusion of other animals and other elements. In the same vein, Zechariah describes God as “watching” over His people (Zechariah 9:8). “Watchmen” were stationed upon the walls as alerts to enemy intrusions (2 Kings 9:17/Ezekiel 3:17). Vineyard owners employed “watchmen” to guard their yards against predators and thieves. The term “watch” in the Bible also points to a division of time: evening, midnight, and morning. A “watch” was originally each of the three or four periods of time into which the night was divided, during which a guard would be stationed to keep a lookout for danger or trouble.

Your life is your doctrine. Your doctrine is your life.

In the same way, Paul admonishes Timothy to guard his life and doctrine against daily intrusions.

What are We to Watch For?

Paul uses the phrase “these things” to describe to Timothy the nature of expected warfare. Toward the end of his life, Paul has observed patterns in the early church and in the culture which surrounded the early church. It was not just external persecution that was happening, forces were now invading the church from the inside out. Heresy was rampant. As a result, believers were abandoning the faith and following deceiving spirits; adhering to things taught by demons while subscribing to godless myths and old wives tales (1 Timothy 4).

How Do We Watch?

‘Diligently,’ or with steady, energetic effort, is the frame of mind suggested by Paul, with a deeper meaning of to ‘meditate upon.’

Exercise ‘diligence’ in sticking with what is ‘sound’, ‘correct’ and ‘right’. Persevere in them and we will have protected ourselves from disastrous consequences. This attitude is the bedrock for the three phases of the believer’s sanctification discussed in this book. Watch your doctrine, self, and others.

The Watch Principle

Since he has been set apart for sanctification, Paul urges Timothy to “watch” or “guard” his doctrine and his spiritual life as well as that of those for whom he had charge.

In forty years of ministry, I have observed this constant maxim: losing faith and succumbing to apostasy happens from the inside out versus the outside in. It is not what is happening around us, but rather what’s happening within us that leads to believer burnout. Correct doctrine is the basis of spiritual maturity. It is simple: most people leave the church not because of the things going on in the church, but because they lack the spiritual maturity to handle the things going on in the church!

There are attitudes, habits, experiences that you must “pay attention to” in guarding against intrusion. For example, in your spiritual life, you may need to pay attention to the need for an enhanced prayer life. Note the bullet points below. Which area do you feel the most need to pray and grow in? Ask the Holy Spirit’s guidance as your walk through this mental exercise.

Things I Must “Watch” for In My Life:

Spiritual (For example: the need for prayer)

- Is prayer an intricate part of my daily life?

Emotional (For example: checking anger)

- Am I holding grudges in my spirit?

Physical (For example: becoming more active)

- Am I neglecting my physical health?

Devotional Scriptures:

1 Peter 5:8, Proverbs 4:23, 2 John 1:8, Deuteronomy 4:9, 1 Timothy 6:20

Watch Your Doctrine

The New International Version positions “doctrine” before “life.” This vertical position shows the importance of correct teaching to the vitality of the believer’s life. Doctrine is “teaching” which states in intellectually responsible terms the message of the gospel and the content of faith.

Our purpose here is not to examine the width and scope of major Christian doctrine(s), but rather to recognize the nature of sound doctrine which promotes the building of the kingdom of God, and which also serves as the basis of our personal relationship with Christ.

“Doctrine” or teaching is a dominant theme in New Testament Scripture, mentioned close to forty times. The Apostle Paul hammers at this theme specifically in both of his letters to Timothy, referencing “teaching” eight times in his first letter and three times in his second one.

How Does Correct Teaching Influence your Life?

Paul makes clear to Timothy exactly what good teaching is. Good teaching has two standards, according to 1 Timothy 6:3. First, correct doctrine is the teaching passed on from Christ to the apostles. Therefore, good doctrine is “apostolic” in nature and is central to fellowship, communion, and prayer (Acts 2: 42) Second, correct teaching leads to godliness or our being set apart for use by God. This is sanctification and it is active and progressive.

<p>Correct doctrine is apostolic in nature.</p>
--

Four Qualities of Correct Teaching

To recognize correct teaching, we must look for its essential qualities. Sound doctrine, according to Scripture, possesses four such attributes:

One, correct teaching is *scriptural*. It is based on the inerrant Word of God. (2 Timothy 3:16)

Two correct teaching has *substance*. It has a definite and discrete property aimed at guidance. (Proverbs 4:2)

Three, correct teaching is *sustainable*. It can be maintained at a certain level and under any circumstances. (Ephesians 4:14)

Four, correct teaching is *salvific*. It is the basis of our relationship with Christ. (1 Timothy 4:13)

Why is Sound Doctrine So Important?

Sound teaching is important for three reasons.

One, sound doctrine grounds against secularism and the ideas of man. This is the age which Paul identifies as that of “itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3).

Two, sound doctrine is the basis of spiritual maturity and empowerment (Hebrews 13:9). Food gives us sustenance, Paul says, but grace strengthens us spiritually as we navigate through life.

Three, sound doctrine is the basis of evangelism in that it provides the foundation of our spiritual integrity (Titus 2:7).

Summary

Doctrine is the basis of who we are as Christians. Our doctrinal tradition is traced back to that which was received by the apostles from Christ and has been guarded or kept since. Correct doctrine is biblical doctrine and has four traits: *scriptural, substance, sustainable and salvific*. Guarding our teaching means we are able to fight the effects of secularism; we have the tools to grow spiritually and we also possess the integrity to evangelize others for Christ.

Your Doctrine is Your Life. Your Life is Your Doctrine.

As stated, doctrine is “teaching” which states in intellectually responsible terms the message of the gospel and the content of faith. It is important to recognize the nature of sound doctrine which promotes the building of the kingdom of God and serves as the basis of our personal relationship with Christ.

What do you believe? Later, we will briefly discuss the merits of writing a brief personal belief statement about what you fundamentally believe as a Christian. Plus, I will give you the practical steps to writing your own personal belief statement.

For now, it is important to grasp the context of our faith and how that context wreaks havoc on what we believe. The teaching we receive shapes our life and our life shapes our teaching. Hence, our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being is tied up in our belief. It is crucial that we care for our soul as well as our body.

Believers must exercise balance just as much as non-believers. Why? Because our faith is subject to wear and tear. We are susceptible to burnout and blowout just like anyone else. Our senses are assaulted daily, no different than the early church, except for social media and the twenty-four seven news cycle.

Nurture your soul. Exercise your body. Release grievances. Tend to your spirit. Always run straight toward the goal of the high calling which is in Christ Jesus!

Devotional Scriptures

John 20:21, 1 Peter 3:15, Psalm 19: 7-8

Watch Your ‘Self’

So far, we have discussed the general topic of the importance of watching our doctrine or teaching as examined by the Apostle Paul’s letter to Timothy. We offered clues as to why Paul was so adamant in his writings to Timothy about correct “teaching,” which he mentions at least eight times in the first letter. Hence, Paul exhorts Timothy to “watch” his teaching, because in doing so, Timothy will “save” both himself and others.

We then moved to the first sub-topic, which covered the characteristics of correct teaching. In other words, what does correct doctrine look like?

We now move to the second stanza of Paul’s exhortation to Timothy: guard or watch yourself. Not only is it imperative to watch your doctrine, but you must also watch yourself in relation to your doctrine, because who you become in Christ is intimately connected to your teaching (doctrine), which guides your sanctification, which governs your thoughts, words and actions.

<p>Who we become in Christ governs our thoughts, words and actions.</p>
--

When Paul writes “...*but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct...*” (1 Timothy 4:12), he is urging Timothy to make certain his words and actions line up with his doctrine. That is, if you believe God, what you do will line up with what you think and speak.

What Does Correct Teaching Save Us From?

Paul admonishes Timothy that if he were to “persevere” in correct doctrine, he will ‘save’ both himself and his hearers.

“Save” is used here to point to the act of protecting from harm or risk; to keep safe from looming disaster as opposed to the concept of salvation through grace. The word also implies an on-going activity; in other words, ‘you will save yourself’ is continuous action in which the believer will avoid disaster after disaster with correct teaching. This is important because the text is not suggesting we can save ourselves by our works. Faith through grace saves us. Correct doctrine protects us.

Two Spheres of the “Watch” Principle

The Bible urges us to “watch” ourselves in two diverse ways.

One, watch *over* your ‘self.’ This is the internal stuff, the confluence of experience that happen on the inside. Do your best to release bitterness, anger, and envy.

Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.

Proverbs 4:23

The second way in which the Bible relates the “watch” principle is watch *out* for your ‘self.’ This points to an awareness of external attack by the enemy.

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:8

The point of the biblical description of the watch principle is you cannot be strong for others if you are not strong yourself and you cannot be strong for yourself if you are not strong for others. If anything describes the state of Christian belief in the modern century, it is weak, sickly sheep who are unable to reproduce spiritual maturity.

Biblical theme of Watching Over and Out for Oneself.

The watching *over* and watching *out* principle is a primary spiritual concept, not to the detriment of others, but rather fortifying ourselves so that we may be of benefit *to* others.

Paul writes, “*We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.*” (Romans 15:1)

A stanza from the Pentateuch begins “So watch yourselves carefully...” (Deuteronomy 4:15)

The author of Hebrews urges, “*For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard...*” (Hebrews 2:1)

Our Lord instructs His disciples, “*Watch and pray that you do not enter temptation.*” (Matthew 26:41)

Summary

Our doctrine or teaching governs who we become in Christ and is the key to spiritual maturity. Correct teaching “saves” us from potential disaster and is a continuous activity. To watch *over* ourselves is to be aware of our inner person, while to watch *out* for ourselves is to be on high alert to the advances of the external enemy.

Watch Yourself: The Heart Continuum

There is a relationship between correct doctrine and our sanctification process. It is expressed through the continuum of our thoughts, words, and actions. The epicenter of this connection is the heart. Recall Proverbs 4:23:

Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.

Each day, our lives are governed by three things:

One, what we think: Watch your thoughts.

Set your mind on things above...

Colossians 3:12

Two, what *we speak*: Watch your words.

Evil words destroy; Godly skill rebuilds.

Proverbs 11:9

Three, what *we do*: Watch your actions.

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good."

(Luke 6:45)

The governing principle for each part of the continuum is the heart. It is our seat of motivation. What we think, speak, and do depends on the condition of our heart. In a sense, each component is programmed by and programs the previous, much like a loop. So always ask: does my heart align with my thoughts, words, and deeds?

It's the Promise Behind Our Thoughts, Words and Actions

What we believe as Christians is based on faith. What we believe about God is based on faith. What our spiritual descendant, Abraham, believed about God was also based on faith. God promised a seed to Abraham, even though Sarah's womb was barren. Abraham believed God's promise. Similarly, what we think, speak and how we act is connected to God's promise and our response according to His word.

Watch Your Thoughts

Our thoughts are the first indicator of the condition of our heart spectrum and about what we believe about God. It has been well said that we become what we think about all day long. We are what we think. Solomon writes,

As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he..."

Proverbs 23:7

Up to 80%
of your
thoughts
are
negative
on any
given day.

Amazingly, according to the experts, humans process 60,000 to 80,000 thoughts per day, 98% of which are brought over from the previous day, and 80% of which are NEGATIVE! Think about it. Most of the thoughts you are thinking today passed through the same brain on yesterday! A negative thought is any thought that causes us to slip, lose hope or that stands in the way of improving our well-being.

So, what are you thinking? Considering the above, we would be hard-pressed to say we tend to think positively all day long, especially in a twenty-four seven news cycle and culture that programs us to think the opposite.

If we are not careful though, we will become caught in the vicious cycle of the “stinky thinky” loop. The stinky-thinky loop is the carousel of negative thinking comprised of:

- Repeating the same mistake over and over
- People close to you reminding you of your mistakes over and over.
- You are reminding yourself of your mistakes over and over.

This sort of thinking keeps the believer in a constant state of self-pity. The Bible clearly speaks on the power of our thinking. Paul writes of the “mind” of Christ quite often across the New Testament. He urges believers to:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:5

How should the believer think? Triumphantly! Think like a victor and not like a victim. A victim asks, “Why is this happening *to* me?” A victor in the same set of circumstances asks, “What is the opportunity *for* me?” Get into the habit of asking these three **power questions**:

1. What am I thinking?
2. Why am I thinking the way I am thinking?
3. What is the solution to the way I am thinking?

Power Verse: Philippians 4:8



Watch Your Words

The second link in the heart continuum are the words that come out of our mouths. It is important to know that we can limit God by our words (Numbers 14:28-35)

Again and again, they put God to the test; they vexed the Holy One of Israel.

Psalm 78:41

Negative *talk* comes from negative *thoughts*. When the twelve spies returned from mapping out the promised land, all but two of them (Joshua and Caleb) gave negative reports. Why? Because they were overwhelmed with negative thoughts after their experience in scoping out the territory. It was not what they *saw* as much as what they *thought* about what they saw. The mistake the twelve spies made was not in giving an honest report of their experience, but rather leaving God out of what they reported about their experience. Do not leave God out of your report!

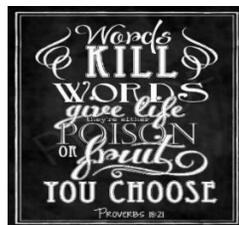
The majority report of the twelve spies point to a phenomenon in which most of us find ourselves all too often: group think. We are surrounded by so many people in our family, friends and co-worker circles that we begin to think and speak like them.

A study of thirty-seven different languages found seven words with very similar meanings (joy, fear, anger, sadness, disgust, shame, guilt) with only ONE positive result: joy. Group think shapes us more than we can imagine!

Ask these three **power questions** throughout your day:

1. What am I saying?
2. Why am I saying what I am saying?
3. What is the solution to what I am saying?

Power Verse: Proverbs 18:21



Watch Your Actions:

Finally, our actions form the final link in the heart continuum and point directly back to what we believe about God. This in my view is where the rubber meets the road. Everything we have been thinking; everything we have been speaking is pretty much evident by our actions. The question is not whether you are walking in what you think and speak, but rather do your actions align with what you think and speak – are you in accord with God – even when what you see is contrary to the evidence!?

The bottom line for believers is this: Our behavior will match what we believe to be true and will reflect whether we believe God's promises. The enemy will blur the line between 'believe in God' and 'believe God'.

Our responsibility as believers is to walk by faith and not by sight. Act as if what you desire is already here – because it is! And the reason we may approach our challenges in such a manner is because we act on God's word and not our own.

To see if your actions agree with God's promises, ask these three **power questions**:

1. How am I acting?
2. Why am I acting the way I am?
3. What is the solution to how I am acting?

Power Verse: Ezra 10:4

POWER THOUGHTS! POWER WORDS! POWER ACTIONS!

“*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses...*” (Acts 1:8), Jesus Christ pronounces upon His disciples after the resurrection and before the ascension. That power makes me His witness in the way I think, speak, and act.

Have you ever given any attention to the thoughts, words, and actions you display on any given day? Most people have not. I am convinced that believers should live by a different lexicon than the rest of the crowd. We are members of the kingdom of God and that kingdom is a peculiar kingdom made up of peculiar people (1 Peter 2:9)! We are God’s people. There is something unique about God’s people. Unique about the way we think about our challenges; unique in the way we speak about those challenges and unique in the way we act in the middle of those challenges because our actions are inextricably tied to our belief in God’s promises!

When our thoughts are connected to God’s word, we connect to God’s power.

Power thoughts define our mindset. When our thoughts are linked to God’s word, we connect to God’s power. Therefore, we can think powerfully through affirmation every day of our lives. When we rise in the morning, our thought process goes into effect:

“A weapon may be formed against me, but it shall not prosper.”

Power words proceed from power thoughts. The Bible is littered with commands, expressions and pronouncements which are at the beckon of believers. “Strong,” “powerful” “living”, “fruit” “understanding”, “love” “believe” are just a sampling. What words come out of your mouth daily? What is your believer’s vocabulary dominated by? Affirmation or refutation?

Power actions sum up your belief system. Whatever you believe (or disbelieve) about God shows up in your actions (or the lack thereof). Actions do not just speak louder than words, actions carry the weight of words, good or bad.

Challenge: A Practical Step to Watch Your Internal Stuff

Keep a journal of your thoughts, words, and actions for seven days. Take note of struggle areas, sin patterns and difficult moments. Resist the urge to judge yourself. This is about identifying those areas of your life in which you may increase your witness to the power invested in you. Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in growing stronger in your weak areas.

Devotional Scriptures

Psalm 39:1, 141:3, Proverbs 13:3, Proverbs 21:23, Ephesians 6:1

Watch Your 'Self'

Not only is it imperative to watch your doctrine, but you must also watch your 'self' in relation to your doctrine, because who you become in Christ is intimately connected to your teaching (doctrine), which guides your sanctification, which governs your thoughts, words, and actions.

As noted, we are to watch *over* and watch *out* for ourselves. It is hard to be strong for others if you are not strong for yourself. This involves self-care, which I define simply as:

Positive behaviors which promote body, mind, and spirit positive outcomes.

Positive Behaviors to Watch *Over* Your Self

How do you care for your body, mind, and spirit well-being?

- Release grievances, anger, resentments.
- Commit to making better nutrition choices and more activity.
- Resist the urge to isolate yourself spiritually.

Positive Behaviors to Watch *Out* for Your Self

The world opposes Christ. The world will oppose you, as well. Opposition shows up in places we may least expect. Wherever it comes from, follow these principles:

- Become involved in something bigger than you.
- Do not get involved in superfluous arguments regarding different religions.
- Write and commit to memory a personal belief statement (More on this later).

Challenge: Read the devotional Scriptures below. Apply them to your present thinking on the value of watching *over* and watching *out* for yourself. Begin a journal and jot down positive words from Bible verses throughout the day. For example, "I can do all things!" (Philippians 4:8)

Devotional Scriptures:

Psalm 39:1, 141:3, Proverbs 13:3, Proverbs 21:23, Ephesians 6:10

Watch Over and Watch Out for Others

The Bible speaks a great deal about the necessity for not only watching or guarding our spiritual person from inner decay, but also about the need to be on guard for the potential negative effects of others while we seek to care for them. We do so more from a spirit of humility and less from a spirit of pride. Correct doctrine (teaching) equips us to “save” (protect from harm) our sanctification and to function as a “safeguard” for the sanctification of others. Therefore, we must watch *over* but we must also watch *out*.

The principle of caring and shepherding is one of the most prominent themes in biblical writ and is not simply relegated to the pastor alone.

Believers are called to watch *over* and watch *out* for others.

It is part of both our biblical and community heritage: “*We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love...*” states the binding covenant in most churches.

What the Bible Says about Watching Over Others

The Bible is full of admonitions for watching over or caring for others, especially those of the household of faith. It is our Christian duty. To watch over is to shepherd or function as a safeguard for another person. In the gym, when two people lift weights, one acts as a “spotter,” whose job is to guide the bar holding the weights so that his partner can safely lift the bar. That is essentially the role we play spiritually in the lives of other believers. We “cover” them, as Christ covers us.

The Bible buttresses this ‘watching over’ concept:

- And sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there. (Matthew 27:36)
- Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3: 16)
- For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.” (Colossians 2:5)

What the Bible Says About Watching *Out* for Others

In the same manner, the Bible warns against blithely exposing ourselves toward the exploitation others may attempt to bring into our lives. So not only do we “watch over” or shepherd, but we also maintain an attitude of “watching out”, as a sentry. In this case, it is more an awareness of the treachery of the enemy that is important. Peter reminds us,

Be sober minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.
(1 Peter 5:8)

Be conscious of, or have an awareness of, the deception of the enemy. In other words, keep your eyes wide open and live with a spirit of discernment. Not everyone who wears the same jersey is on the same team. Here is a biblical sampling of this principle:

- I appeal to you, brothers, to *watch out* for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. (Romans 16:17,18)
- And Jesus answered and said to them, “See to it that no one misleads you...” (Matthew 24:4)
- Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. (Luke 17:1-3)
- Here I am sending you out like sheep with wolves all around you; so be as wise as serpents and yet as harmless as doves. But be on your guard against men. (Matthew 10:16)

Why It is Important to Watch *Over* Others

Your strength is formed in community.

There are three primary reasons for watching over others. One, it is our biblical command and covenant. Indeed, it is the foundation of our Christian witness to love others. Two, we were not saved to become “spiritual islands.” We are called into a community of the called. Three, related to number two, our strength is formed in community. As we see above, the Bible absolutely commands us to carry one another’s burdens. These commands are connected to our covenant with God and with one another.

Summary

We have a responsibility as believers for the well-being of others of the household of faith. Watching over others is a shepherding act in which one “spots” a fellow believer against temptation and dysfunction behavior. Conversely, watching out for others is to guard against the exploitation of the enemy from a position of discernment.

Practical Pointers for Watch Over and Watch Out for Others

Here are some practical considerations for both dimensions we just discussed, watching over and out for others. Remember, it is not so much the person as much as it is the spiritual belief system that person is operating from that we must concern ourselves.

Watch Over:

shepherd, safeguard, “spotter,” cover

Think about someone whom you care about deeply but may be concerned they are sliding into sinful and dysfunctional behavior, or they may be showing evidence of depression. Ask these three questions:

- Are they isolating themselves?
- Have they lost weight or gained weight for no apparent reason?
- Do they express random thoughts of suicide ideation?

Watch Out:

conscious of, awareness, eyes wide open

Think about a current or recent situation in which you felt your best interests were not being served.

Be on guard for people who exhibit these attributes:

- Always asking but never giving.
- Praise you but never promote you.
- Rarely checks in on you during challenging times.

Watch Those Scoffers (Psalm 1)

A scoffer is a person who derides or criticizes the dreams and success of others. Do you have any scoffers who majors in the following?

- Subjectively critical of your dreams.
- Derisive of your relationships.
- Overuses words such as “can’t,” “won’t” and “don’t” in relation to your advancement.

Challenge: Watching *over*, watching *out* for others, and dealing with scoffers can be stressful. As you read the devotional scriptures, think of creative ways physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually for dealing with the above groups in your circle.

Devotional Scriptures:

1 Peter 5:3, Hebrews 10:25, Proverbs 29:7-9, Isaiah 5:18-1

Watch Those Dogs!

In Philippians 3:2, The Apostle Paul lashes out at those who are looking out for their own interests, who scavenge like wild dogs, seeking whatever they can take from others without giving anything in return. As mentioned above, those type of people exist in the believer's realm, also.

Why are we commanded to be on the lookout for the deception of the enemy? There are three reasons. One, the devil uses many guises to deplete our spiritual, mental, and physical resources. Two, when we try the spirit by the Spirit (1 John 4:1) we uncover the ruse of the enemy. Three, it helps to protect us from the deceit which others may bring into our lives.

To "watch those dogs", learn to recognize the many forms of deception that are prominent. Dr. Stuart Scott cites four types:

One, an outright lie. This would be the unqualified reverse of the truth (Genesis 3:4).

Two, an exaggeration, which is elasticizing the truth or the "truth plus a lie" (Genesis 25:32).

Three, a half or partial truth. This is giving only part of the information (Genesis 12:13).

Four types of deceit:

- 1.outright lie
- 2.exaggeration
- 3.half-truth
- 4.evasion

Four, an evasion of the truth, which happens when one changes the subject or does not really answer the question (Genesis 4:9).

We also must guard against negative programming from those persons and sources which lead us to believe certain things that are not necessarily truth and wreak havoc on our spiritual maturity.

The Top Five Negative Conditioning Sources and What to Do About Them

How do we as believers stay positive, upbeat, and ready to conquer the challenges before us? How do we stay “in the ready” for all spiritual warfare that meet and greet us daily?

We keep our head up! We must stay alert to what is happening around us but, more importantly, what is happening within us.

There is a war going on. The Apostle Paul reminds us about the nature of this war:

“...for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

(Ephesians 6:12)

The enemy uses “mental conditioning” to spiritually “de-condition” the believer. This conditioning is happening in very subtle ways, with people and experiences we do not really view with any degree of suspicion.

Negative conditioning happens in subtle ways.

We are being habituated about every day of our lives. Some of it is positive, but most of the programming is negative.

Here are five sources of negative conditioning and what we can do about it.

Source# 1: Family and Friends

Family and friends can be potential dream-busters when it comes to our ambitions. They may be well-meaning, but they can also become roadblocks. How many times have you been told ‘you cannot or ‘you’re wasting your time’? It is the everyday chatter with negative people that snuffs our dreams.

Solution:

The best thing to do is keep a healthy distance (since some of these people may be in the same house!), stay focused and keep believing in your dreams.

Source#2: Local News

Television stations are locked in a constant war for ratings and to get the most viewers, they must report on what viewers like most: violence, corruption and scandal. The real reason the media has made my list, though, is because of the proximity of late local news to bedtime. The sub-conscious

mind is most permeable in the minutes before we fall asleep at night. Going to bed with all the internalized, mostly negative news does nothing but seep into our deeper mind while we're asleep.

Solution:

In the hour or minutes before bed, try reading a book, doing light exercise, and stretching or watching something comical on television. My favorite is reciting bible-based affirmations!

Source#3: Bad Theology

As a minister of the Word, this one bothers me the most. I grew up in the church and I relish some fond memories of that time. But truth be told, when you hear over and over how bad you are and how unlovable you appear to be, it takes its toll on your psyche at some point. Not all religious traditions serve parishioners a steady diet of damnation, but far too often we hear about a merciless versus merciful God.

Solution:

The good news is you don't have the fire the preacher! Read and interpret your religious text. Draw your own conclusions. Seek God for guidance within your own personal time with Him. Most of all, know that God is compassionate, long-suffering, and full of mercy.

Source#4: Reality Television

Who knew the advent of reality television decades ago would present such convoluted images daily? Reality TV makes the list due to that one word: images. The conditioning we experience in this regard is the blurring of the line between right and wrong. This is not only bad for the individual, but for society as well – namely because it makes us less empathetic to do something about it. Although images can be a good thing, the kind we see on the tube every day is not so good.

Solution:

The power of the remote control! This is where turning off the television comes in. Just like anything else, watch reality television with moderation.

Source#5: social media

Look at social media for what it is: connecting. The question is who and what are you connecting to? Herein lays the issue. It would be great if every person on your Facebook page was an idealistic,

positive-centered, up-lifter, right? Well, they are not! Most people Facebook their issues instead of FACING them. That negative energy feeds right into your spirit on a parallel track.

Solution:

‘Un-friend’ kindly or, at the least, take a break from social media.

We must become vigilant to the negative conditioning taking place in our lives and realize that this conditioning happens very often and with great subtlety.

Devotional Scriptures:

1 Peter 5:3, Hebrews 10:25, Proverbs 29:7-9, Isaiah 5:18-1

How to Write a Personal Belief Statement (PBS)

What is a Personal Belief Statement?

A personal belief statement is what you believe about the message of the gospel.

A personal belief statement is a concise, meaningful, Bible-based statement of confidence in what you believe about the message of the gospel. It should be short enough for you to commit to memory yet powerful enough for you to believe in without reservation. Therefore, a short and powerful personal belief statement should be no more than three sentences long.

A personal belief statement should also be committed to memory.

Why a Personal Belief Statement?

A personal belief statement is necessary because of the primary word: belief. Specifically, how that belief is challenged in a post-modern, secular world in which there is an abundance of belief systems.

To ‘believe’ is at the heart of the Christian faith. If you shake a person’s belief, you have conquered the person. ‘Believe’ is found at least 249 times throughout the Bible, mostly in the New Testament. Most of the New Testament utterances are attributed to Christ. For example,

*Jesus said to him, ‘If you are able **to believe**, all things are possible to him who believes.’*

Mark 9:23

The Greek verb points to a settled matter with no room for debate, an invaluable attitude, given the high degree of interaction with secular culture. Jude, facing the same secular spirit of deception we still see today, writes,

“Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

(Jude 3)

This is the primary reason it will do the modern believer well to write and memorize a personal belief statement.

Note: A personal belief statement is NOT a declaration of independence from your local church’s statement of faith! In fact, it is a mirror of that message. Consider the vision and mission of your

congregation as you work through developing your personal belief statement. The two should resonate!

How Do I Write a Personal Belief Statement?

A personal belief statement requires prayer, reflection, and an attitude of reception to the leading of the Holy Spirit. A good starting foundation for a personal belief statement has four components. One, your cultural identity states who you are as human being. Two, your spiritual affirmation is confirming your standing in Christ. Three, your statement of faith enumerates your understanding of the message of the gospel. Four, it includes a scripture verse to back up the belief.

Watch Your Life

Four Building Blocks for a Personal Belief Statement

1. Cultural identity: *My name is...*
2. Spiritual affirmation: *I am...*
3. Statement of faith: *I believe...*
4. Scriptural support

Example:

My name is Wayne E. Croomes. I am a defender of the faith. This is the gospel in which I believe: Christ was crucified. Christ was buried. Christ was resurrected. Christ ascended into heaven. Christ is coming back again. I receive it. I believe it. I decree it for every person!

1 Corinthians 15:4

Assignment:

Reflect on this. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit's guidance. Use the blank worksheet on the next page to write your personal belief statement. Remember, write your statement according to your personality, your spiritual gift and how you best express your gift. Be sure to base it on Scripture. Believe it. Memorize it. Share it.

To Summarize

Correct doctrine is “teaching” which states in intellectually responsible terms the message of the gospel and the content of faith. Correct teaching buffers the believer from potential disastrous effects. Our doctrine, or what we believe, becomes our “rule” of life, the standard by which we measure our faith amid a post-modern, fast-paced world.

The command to watch, guard, or to function as sentry is woven metaphorically throughout Scripture.

There are attitudes, habits, experiences that you must “pay attention to” in guarding against intrusion. For example, in your spiritual life, you may need to pay attention to the need for an enhanced prayer life.

Correct teaching is *scriptural*, has *substance* is *sustainable* and is *salvific*.

We have a responsibility to watch out and over ourselves and our loved ones and fellow believers. Watch for negative emotions, sin patterns, areas of struggle, bad relationships and other negative conditioning sources – they all impact negatively our belief.

Watch those “dogs” and be aware of the four types of deception: One, an outright lie. Two, an exaggeration. Three, a half or partial truth. Four, an evasion of the truth.

Make power thinking, power speaking and power acting a daily mandate, regardless of your circumstances.

A personal belief statement is a concise, meaningful, Bible-based statement of confidence in what you believe about the message of the gospel. It should be short enough for you to commit to memory yet powerful enough for you to believe in without reservation and it should resonate with the mission and vision of the local congregation.

THE AUTHOR

Pastor W. Eric Croomes



Works cited:

Dr. Stuart Scott, *Communication and Conflict Resolution: A Biblical Perspective*
T. W. Hunt, *The Mind of Christ*

Other titles by Pastor W. Eric Croomes:

Surge into the New: Stand Up Reach God's Excellence
Brotha2Brotha: Becoming Healthy Men from the Inside Out
Life's a Gym: Seven Fitness Principles to Get the Best of Both
Dance in the Dark: Poetic Reflections on Love and Culture
How to Build Your Belief Power

Find these and other titles at:

www.pastorwericcroomes.com

All rights reserved. ©PWECMINISTRIES2023
No part of this document shall be reproduced, distributed, or otherwise copied without the expressed and authorized consent in writing of PWECMINISTRIES.