

A C T S 2 0 : 2 8

TAKE HEED OF YOURSELVES

Awareness Before Assignment

*“Keep watch over yourselves
and all the flock...”*

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INTRODUCTION

Awareness Before Assignment

ACTS 20:28 (NIV)

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock...

This morning, I want to ask you a simple but important question:

When was the last time you intentionally took heed of yourself?

Not your husband.

Not your wife.

Not your children.

Not your pastor.

Not your workplace.

Not society.

Yourself.

It is amazing how easily we can become experts on everybody else while remaining unaware of what is happening within us.

We notice where others need to grow.

We notice what others should change.

We notice what others should be doing differently.

Yet Paul, speaking to the leaders of the church in Acts 20, says: “Keep watch over yourselves...”

Before he tells them to shepherd the flock, before he speaks about ministry, before he speaks about their responsibility for others, he tells them to watch themselves.

You cannot lead others well if you are no longer leading yourself.

You cannot faithfully steward what God has placed in your hands while neglecting what is happening in your own heart.

The words “take heed” or “keep watch” mean: Pay close attention. Be alert. Become aware.

One of the greatest dangers for Christians is not necessarily that we stop loving God. It is that we stop paying attention.

We continue attending church.

We continue serving.

We continue fulfilling responsibilities.

We may even continue appearing spiritually strong.

But inwardly, we may be drifting. And drift is dangerous because it rarely announces itself. It happens gradually — one neglected thought, one delayed act of obedience, one tolerated attitude, one small compromise at a time.

Summer is often a season when life slows down. We rest. We travel. Our routines change. Perhaps this summer God is inviting us not only to rest physically, but to become spiritually aware again.

Perhaps He is saying: “Slow down long enough to notice what is happening within you.”

Because awareness is not condemnation. Awareness is an invitation from God to return to alignment.

PAUSE & REFLECT

**When was the last time you took heed of yourself?
Where might you be drifting — quietly, one small
compromise at a time?**

God's Original Design Was Partnership

Whenever we hear teaching about purpose, we become excited. We love Jeremiah 29:11. We love Ephesians 2:10. We love hearing that God has created us with purpose. And He has.

But purpose is not merely what you accomplish. Purpose is the reason for which something was created. If you do not understand God's intention for your life, you may become very busy doing things He never asked you to do.

Have you ever noticed that God's first picture of purpose was incredibly ordinary? It was a garden.

Adam was not preaching.

He was not performing miracles.

He was not leading worship.

He was not travelling to the nations.

He was cultivating a garden.

Naming animals.

Working faithfully.

Creating. Learning.

Stewarding what God had entrusted to him.

But the most beautiful part of Eden was not the work. It was the fellowship. Adam walked with God.

Imagine those conversations. As Adam cultivated the garden, wisdom did not come from a seminar. It came from walking with God.

***Purpose was never meant to be separated
from relationship.***

God did not simply give Adam an assignment. He gave Adam access to Himself. The assignment flowed from the relationship.

Sometimes we become so focused on discovering our assignment that we neglect the One who gave it. We become fascinated with what God wants to do through us, while paying little attention to what He wants to do in us.

“Lord, use me.”

“Lord, bless me.”

“Lord, enlarge my influence.”

“Lord, show me my purpose.”

But perhaps God is asking: “Will you let Me shape you?”

Because God is not simply preparing an assignment for you. He is preparing you for the assignment. Your gift may take you into places that your character must be able to sustain.

Before there is public fruit, there must be private formation.

PAUSE & REFLECT

What is God wanting to do IN you right now — not just through you? Where might He be shaping your character for what lies ahead?

Jesus Restored Partnership

Jesus came to restore what was lost in Eden. Listen to His invitation in John 15: “Abide in Me...” Remain in Me. Stay connected to Me. Live in relationship with Me.

And then: “You will bear much fruit.” Notice the order. Jesus never said, “Produce fruit so that you can remain in Me.” He said, “Remain in Me, and fruit will come.”

Fruit is not produced by frantic activity. It is the natural outcome of connection.

We often try to produce externally what can only be formed internally. We try harder. We become busier. We add more responsibilities. We make more promises. But Jesus brings us back to the source: “Abide in Me.”

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13

Continue to work out your salvation with fear and

trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.

Paul does not say, “Sit back and let God do everything.” Nor does he say, “Everything depends on you.” He says: Work out — because God is working in.

We position ourselves. God transforms us.

We obey. He empowers.

We discipline ourselves. He gives us strength.

We renew our minds. He changes the direction of our lives.

Adam cultivated. God gave the life.

Jesus says, “Abide.” Paul says, “Work out what God is already working in.”

***That has always been God’s design:
relationship, partnership and stewardship.***

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where are you trying to produce by effort what can only grow from connection? What would “abiding” look like this week?

THREE

Awareness Is the Beginning of Transformation

The Holy Spirit is always at work. He convicts. He teaches. He guides. He reminds. He comforts. He reveals. But He does not force us. He invites us to respond. That means we have a responsibility to become aware.

Sometimes we pray: “Lord, show me Your will.”
Meanwhile, God may be saying: “I have been trying to show you your heart.”

Sometimes we pray: “Lord, open the next door.” And perhaps He is saying: “Before I open the door, I want to open your eyes.”

Because sometimes the greatest obstacle to our next season is not outside us. It is something within us that we have not yet been willing to acknowledge.

Taking heed of ourselves means having the courage to ask honest questions:

Am I aware of the burden God has placed in my heart?

Am I aware of the fear that keeps stopping me?

Am I aware of the excuses I have spiritualised?

Am I aware of the habits that are quietly shaping my life?

Am I aware of the thoughts I repeatedly allow into my mind?

Am I aware of the areas in which God is inviting me to grow?

What we repeatedly think shapes what we believe.

What we believe affects the decisions we make.

The decisions we repeatedly make become habits.

Our habits shape the direction of our lives.

We may not always be able to control what enters our minds, but we can learn to take our thoughts captive and decide what we will continue to entertain.

Sometimes we say: "I'm waiting on God." And sometimes that is absolutely true. But sometimes it actually means: "I'm afraid." "I don't know where to begin." "I don't feel ready." "What if I fail?" "What will people think?" "I don't want to leave what is comfortable."

God cannot transform what I continually refuse to acknowledge.

Some of us avoid looking honestly at ourselves because we are afraid of what we will find. We think that if we acknowledge our weakness, failure or inconsistency, God will be disappointed with us.

But God is not revealing our condition so that He can reject us. He is revealing what needs His healing, truth and transforming power.

ROMANS 8:1

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Condemnation says, “There is something wrong with you, and there is no hope.” Conviction says, “This is not who you are. Come back into alignment with who God created you to be.”

Condemnation causes us to hide from God.

Conviction draws us toward God.

Shame says, “Cover yourself.”

Grace says, “Come into the light.”

When Adam became aware of his nakedness, he hid. But God came looking for him and asked, “Where are you?”

God was not asking because He had lost Adam's location. He was helping Adam recognise his condition.

God still asks us, "Where are you?"

Where are you emotionally?

Where are you spiritually?

Where are you in your thinking?

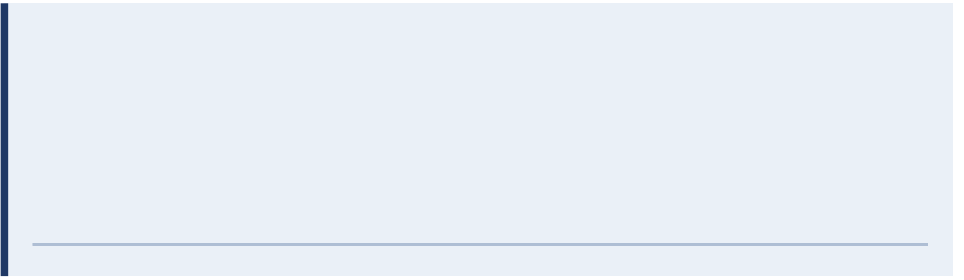
Where are you in your obedience?

Not because He wants to condemn you, but because He wants to restore you. He already knows it — but I must become willing to see it.

Awareness is the first step towards alignment.

PAUSE & REFLECT

If God asked you today, "Where are you?" — how would you answer, honestly? What have you been unwilling to see?



When We Stop Taking Heed

When we stop paying attention to our lives, it often appears in one of three ways: laziness, procrastination, and complacency. These three may look different, but each one keeps us from responding to what God is showing us.

1. Laziness — “I don’t want the effort”

Laziness is knowing what needs to be done but refusing the effort required to do it. It says: “This is too difficult.” “This requires too much effort.” “I don’t feel like doing it.” “Someone else will take care of it.”

We want the harvest, but we do not want to cultivate the field. We want spiritual maturity, but without spiritual discipline. We want stronger relationships, but without difficult conversations. We want change, but without changing our habits.

PROVERBS 13:4

A sluggard’s appetite is never filled, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.

The lazy person still has desires — dreams, ideas, good intentions. The problem is not the absence of desire; it is the unwillingness to apply consistent effort. Laziness says, “I want the result, but I do not want the responsibility required to produce it.”

In Matthew 25, the servant had been entrusted with something, but he buried it. His laziness was not simply inactivity; it was a failure to steward what his master had placed in his hands.

2. Procrastination — “I’ll do it later”

Procrastination is delaying the obedience we already know God is asking from us. It is not always a lack of knowledge. Sometimes we already know enough.

We know we need to apologise.

We know we need to forgive.

We know we need to begin.

We know we need to stop.

We know we need to ask for help.

We know we need to return to God.

But we postpone action. In Acts 24, Felix listened as Paul spoke about righteousness, self-control and the coming judgment. Felix became afraid. He was convicted. Yet he

replied: “That’s enough for now... when I find it convenient, I will send for you.”

Felix was not openly rejecting the truth. He was postponing his response to it. But delayed obedience is still disobedience.

JAMES 4:17

If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.

It is possible to hear many sermons, read many books and attend many conferences, yet remain unchanged — not because we lack revelation, but because we have not acted on the revelation we already received.

We often overestimate what we need before we begin. God may not give us the complete map. He often gives us enough light for the next step. You do not have to understand everything to obey something.

What is the one act of obedience you have been postponing?

3. Complacency — “I’ve done enough”

Complacency is becoming comfortable with where we are and losing the desire to continue growing. It is dangerous because it can disguise itself as contentment.

Biblical contentment says: “I am grateful for what God has given me.” Complacency says: “I no longer need to grow.” It whispers: “I’ve already served.” “I’ve already learned that.” “I’ve gone far enough.” “At least I’m doing better than that person.”

But our standard is not another person. Our standard is Christ.

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on...

Paul refused to believe that previous growth meant he had finished growing. Complacency says, “I have already done enough.” Paul says, “I have not yet arrived, so I continue pressing forward.”

Complacency rarely arrives suddenly. It quietly settles in through comfort, fear, pride, distraction, familiarity, and living on yesterday's victories. Yesterday's obedience cannot replace today's obedience.

***The question is not only “Have I grown?” but
“Am I still growing?”***

PAUSE & REFLECT

**Which of the three — laziness, procrastination,
complacency — is most at work in you right now?
What is it costing you?**

FIVE

The Invitation

Can you see the pattern?

Laziness says: “I don’t want the effort.”

Procrastination says: “I’ll do it later.”

Complacency says: “I’ve done enough.”

But a heart that takes heed says: “Holy Spirit, show me where You want me to grow — and give me the courage to respond.” That is partnership.

The Holy Spirit cannot obey for us. He cannot choose honesty for us. He cannot have the difficult conversation for us. He cannot forgive for us. He cannot cultivate our character for us. He cannot renew our thinking without our cooperation.

He empowers. He convicts. He teaches. He strengthens. He leads. But we must choose to respond.

That is why Paul says: “Work out your salvation... for it is God who works in you.” Our responsibility is not to manufacture transformation. Our responsibility is to position ourselves, respond to God and take the next obedient step. God’s responsibility is the transformation.

SIX

A Way of Life: Stop · Look · Respond · Walk

Awareness must become more than something we experience during a sermon. It must become a way of life.

The strongest example is the prodigal son. Luke 15:17 says: “When he came to himself...” That is awareness. The turning point did not begin when he reached his father’s house. It began when he became willing to recognise his true condition.

He had left his father’s house physically, but before that, his heart had already moved away. Drift always begins before we see its visible consequences.

He stopped blaming the famine. He stopped blaming the people who would not help him. He stopped pretending that everything was fine. He became honest about where he was. But awareness was not the end. He said, “I will arise and go to my father.”

He stopped.

He looked.

He responded.

And then he walked.

1. Stop

Before I change anything, I stop. Psalm 46:10 says: “Be still, and know that I am God.” Awareness rarely begins in busyness. It begins in stillness.

We live in a world filled with noise. But if we never become still, we may remain busy without recognising that we are moving in the wrong direction. Stillness is not inactivity. Stillness creates the space in which we can hear, see and become aware.

Pray: “Holy Spirit, help me to see what You want me to see.”

2. Look

Now I honestly look at myself. Not my neighbour. Not my spouse. Not my pastor. Me.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:5

Examine yourselves... test yourselves.

Self-examination is not self-condemnation. It is creating space for the Holy Spirit to show me what is true about

my present condition. David prayed: “Search me, O God, and know my heart...” (Psalm 139:23–24).

“Examine yourself” — I accept responsibility for paying attention. “Search me, O God” — I invite the Holy Spirit to reveal what I cannot see on my own.

Ask yourself: Where am I avoiding responsibility? What have I been postponing? Where have I become too comfortable? What thought keeps returning that I keep ignoring? What habit is shaping me into someone I do not want to become? Where is the Holy Spirit inviting me to grow?

Do not defend. Do not blame. Do not compare. Simply look honestly. You cannot change what you are unwilling to confront.

3. Respond

Now I decide what I will do. Not ten things. One thing. We often become overwhelmed because we think transformation requires changing our whole lives at once. But great change often begins with one small act of obedience.

One conversation. One apology. One phone call.
One application. One hour with God.

One healthy boundary. One habit.

One act of forgiveness. One decision to ask for help.

One baby step.

You do not have to take every step today. But you must take the next step. Ask: “What is one thing I can do in response to what God has shown me?” Then decide when you will do it. A good intention without a decision often becomes another form of procrastination.

4. Walk

Tomorrow, do it again. Stop. Look. Respond. Walk.

Awareness is not a one-time event. It is a lifestyle.

Taking heed means learning to notice your thoughts, your attitudes, your habits and the movements of the Holy Spirit within you. It means making small adjustments before you drift far from where God is leading you.

You do not become spiritually mature through one dramatic moment. You become mature through repeated daily choices to respond to God.

Direction matters more than speed. A small step in the right direction is still movement.

PAUSE & REFLECT

What is the ONE thing God is asking of you — and when will you do it? Write it down. A decision with a date is obedience beginning.

CONCLUSION

What Is He Making You Aware Of?

As we finish, I do not want to ask you, “What is your purpose?” I believe God is asking a different question: “What am I trying to make you aware of?”

Perhaps it is a relationship. Perhaps an attitude. Perhaps fear. Perhaps how you are using your time. Perhaps a habit that is quietly directing your life. Perhaps a dream God placed in your heart years ago that you have put on the shelf. Perhaps something you already know you need to do, but keep waiting for a more convenient time. Perhaps simply His invitation to spend time with Him again.

God’s desire has never changed. From the Garden of Eden, to Jesus’ invitation to abide, to the Holy Spirit living within us today, God’s desire has always been partnership.

He is interested in what we do, but even more in who we are becoming while we do it.

Your assignment matters — but the person carrying it matters too.

Your gift matters — but your character must be able to carry your gift.

Your future matters — but it is being shaped by the decisions you make today.

So let us hear Paul's words afresh:

Take heed of yourselves.

Stop. Look. Respond. Walk.

Become aware of what the Holy Spirit is revealing.

Allow Him to bring you back into alignment.

Take the next step of obedience.

And then watch as God produces in you — and through you — the fruit that only He can produce.

*“Keep watch over yourselves
and all the flock.”*

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