How to Stay Alert and Awake

Selected Scriptures

Last week I shared with you the words of Jesus and the apostle Paul who encouraged Christians to “be alert,” and “stay awake.” Today I want to share with you, from the scriptures, some things we should be doing to “be watching for Jesus’ coming.” If you heard my sermon last week you heard me say that “watching for His coming” does not mean watching the sky for Jesus, but instead it means to stay spiritually aware and active until Jesus returns. Today I will attempt you answer the question of “how?” Pastor Lee Ronshaugen taught me that when he hears a pastor teach a principle he is often frustrated when the “Yes, but how?” question goes unanswered. Today is the “How?”

With that said, consider with me, 12 ways to stay spiritually awake.

Number 1

Make physical health a priority in your life

Romans 12:1-2 says:

12 And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. 2 Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2 NLT

Some people try to separate physical health and spiritual health, and while they are different things, they cannot be completely separated. Lack of sleep, poor nutrition, and lack of exercise will all have negative effects on your ability to function spiritually. Offering your body to God means taking seriously our need for getting enough sleep, eating a healthy diet of proteins, carbs, fats, and minerals, and exercising so that we will have enough energy to accomplish the tasks God has prepared for us. The formula for this really is simple, it isn’t necessarily easy to do, but if we don’t, our spiritual well-being will suffer.

Number 2

Pray for strength.

God knows that we need His strength to live an abundant life in the midst of difficulty. Ask Him to give you strength. Jesus told His disciples:

36 Keep alert at all times. And pray that you might be strong enough to escape these coming horrors and stand before the Son of Man.”

Luke 21:36 NLT

Whether you feel strong or weak, keep praying for strength, because you never know how hard a day can be until after the day is over.

Number 3

Prepare your mind for action

The apostle Peter wrote:

13 So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. 14 So you must live as God’s obedient children. Don’t slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn’t know any better then.

1 Peter 1:12-13 NLT

Preparing our minds for action requires self-control. Peter reminds the reader that our hope comes from God’s grace and that grace is sufficient for us to say “yes” to God’s ways and say “no” to our own selfish desires. Practically speaking, we are to use our minds for things that are pure and noble and praiseworthy; things that are usually directly opposed to our self-centered desires.

Number 4

Don’t let yourself be weighed down

34 “Watch out! Don’t let your hearts be dulled by carousing and drunkenness, and by the worries of this life. Don’t let that day catch you unaware, 35 like a trap.

Luke 21:34-35 NLT

This is a tricky one. When we experience physical or emotional pain, it is normal, and dare I say healthy, to find ways to dull the pain. However, be careful, medications are meant to be used for a temporary dullness to make the pain bearable for a moment. The ultimate goal is to get back to health instead of continuing down the rabbit hole of escape. Being alive includes bearing some pain and being comfortably numb is not living. Keep pain and worry in their proper perspective, they are meant to keep us close to our Savior as opposed to a bottle of Jack Daniels or Oxy-codone. If you try and rely on methods of escape for relief, you will just find yourself seeking more and more means of numbing.

Number 5

Be Doers of the Word

The book of James records:

22 But don’t just listen to God’s word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. 23 For if you listen to the word and don’t obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. 24 You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. 25 But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don’t forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

James 1:22-25 NLT

This kind of ties in with the principle of not being weighed down. When we know what we should be doing and we aren’t doing it, we will be weighed down. As you learn God’s desires for your life, put them into action. Jesus saved us so that we would be free to live for His glory. If we actively or passively shrink back from living out his commands we only have two choices, repent or find ways to silence the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Number 6

Strengthen your brothers (and sisters)

Our own battle to stay spiritually alert should act as a reminder that our brothers and sisters in Christ are fighting the same battle. Trouble and difficulty is no respecter of persons. Jesus said to Simon Peter:

31 “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat. 32 But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers.”

Luke 22:31-32 NLT

We all have a responsibility to help others who are going through the same hardships that we have gone through. Remember Paul’s words to the Corinthians:

3 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. 4 He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. 5 For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. 6 Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. 7 We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us.

2 Corinthians 1:3-7 NLT

Number 7

Cast off Deeds of Darkness

Every one of us have things in our lives that we keep secret, figuratively speaking, things we do in the shadow of darkness. In order to be spiritually alert, we are to cast those things aside. As I alluded to earlier, these deeds of darkness will weigh us down. Satan loves it when we are weighed down and feel like we have to stay in hiding, because if we are in hiding, we won’t be bold about who Jesus is, what He has done, and what He is going to do. If you struggle in secret, share your struggle with someone who loves you and let them help you cast it aside.

11 This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is; time is running out. Wake up, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. So remove your dark deeds like dirty clothes, and put on the shining armor of right living. 13 Because we belong to the day, we must live decent lives for all to see. Don’t participate in the darkness of wild parties and drunkenness, or in sexual promiscuity and immoral living, or in quarreling and jealousy. 14 Instead, clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And don’t let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires.

Romans 13:11-14 NLT

Number 8

Pray against Temptation

One of the best ways to keep yourself from the deeds of darkness is to avoid the temptation all together. Ideally, we would be strong enough and pure enough to say “no” even in the most difficult of temptation, but the scriptures suggest praying against the temptation. Jesus had asked His disciples to pray for Him, but apparently they should have first prayed for themselves. The book of Matthew records:

40 Then he returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, “Couldn’t you watch with me even one hour? 41 Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!”

Matthew 26:40-41 NLT

Whether their slumber came from failing to take care of their physical needs or from a dullness of heart isn’t made clear. But their sleep, in that hour, was a result of giving in to temptation. Pray against it.

Number 9

Present Yourself to God for His Works

This principle is closely related to offering your body as a living sacrifice. It involves making a conscious decision that your heart, mind, and soul are made for His purposes. The book of Romans says:

10 When (Jesus) died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. 11 So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

12 Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. 13 Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. 14 Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace.

Romans 6:10-14 NLT

Number 10

Be Zealous for God and His Way of Living

Though I am calling this number 10, it is really the overarching principle for the whole sermon.

11 Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. 12 Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. 13 When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you. Don’t curse them; pray that God will bless them. 15 Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with each other. Don’t be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don’t think you know it all!

Romans 12:11-16 NLT

Jesus did not save us so we could kick back on the couch and wait for Him to pull us out of the world. Instead He saved us so that we would live according to His example. An example that shows itself directly opposed to the ways of the worldly.

Number 11

Mutually encourage one another

11 For I long to visit you so I can bring you some spiritual gift that will help you grow strong in the Lord. 12 When we get together, I want to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encouraged by yours.

Romans 1:11-12 NLT

Paul was a heavy hitter, I am sure that if any of us met him in person we may be tempted to bow down in awe. However, by his own admission, Paul needed to be encouraged by the faith of others. We have all been given different gifts and if we fail to use them, even the people we look up to may be discouraged. Your gift is just as important to me as my gift is to you.

Number 12

Be assured that God desires all people to be saved

Sometimes our slothfulness and lack of zeal comes from a belief that some people are beyond reaching. Maybe we think that someone is too far gone, or that they are simply evil and destined for destruction. God desires that all people would be saved. He doesn’t give up on them until the day of their death and neither should we. As 1 Timothy 2 says:

2 I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. 2 Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. 3 This is good and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. 5 For,

There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. 6 He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone.

1 Timothy 2:1-6 NLT

Yes, you and I were saved the moment we put our trust in Jesus. So, logically, we are saying, “come Lord Jesus, come.” But God doesn’t want us to rest in our blessed assurance like couch potatoes numbing our sorrows with cheesecake, IPA’s, capital investment schemes, and whatever else we would use to pass the time. God has called us to action and His plan is that we would be spiritually alert in order to play our part as He saves any and every person who would trust in Him and His deliverance.

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Present yourself to God for His works

Be zealous for God and His way of living

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I know that under each of these 12 principles there are a bunch of “yes, but how?” questions. But hopefully today was helpful for you in your journey in knowing how to stay spiritually alert.