

## **The Art of Paying Attention**

Off the Top of My Head. May 17, 2007. By Dave Gibson

**One of our greatest sources of trouble in life is not paying attention.** I once heard a short segment of a seminar on safety issues for women. I don't remember much of what the presenter said but one thing she said I will never forget. She said that the most important rule in personal safety is: "Be aware of your surroundings. Never, ever, ever loose track of what is happening near you."

After she said this one of the women in the seminar raised her hand and said, "I don't want to live like that—I don't want to be that paranoid." The presenter responded, "I am not counseling you to be paranoid; I am counseling you to be aware. Women who get in trouble are women who don't pay attention."

The presenter went on to tell a fascinating story about a female police officer who violated this principle. The female officer was going to work at 5 in the morning, rushing out the door of her home with her purse and a cup of coffee and juggling her keys. She locked her front door, having never looked around herself, and turned around to see a pistol in her face, three men with duct tape, and her own car door open. They forced her into her car and began to drive away. Fortunately for this woman she had her service revolver in her purse, was able to draw it, and shot two of the three men before the third man fled. Moral of the story: Here is a police officer who is trained to be aware of her surroundings and who forgot this important principle.

"Be aware of your surroundings. Never, ever, ever loose track of what is happening near you." This simple principle has been very helpful to me. I have tried to live by it ever since. I use it when I drive. I use it when I go in my back yard at night to fold up the patio umbrella. I use it when I sit in a meeting. I use it when I walk over to pick up my mail. I use it when I am shopping. Since using this new awareness I have avoided some accidents, I have seen people loitering who were clearly up to no good, I have seen couples steal items from Kroger's, I have thwarted two or three pick pockets, and I have seen a criminal walking across a parking lot whom I had voted to convict on a jury trial a year earlier.

This simple principle of attentiveness to our surroundings has spiritual applications as well. Just as we get too familiar with our physical surroundings and stop being aware, we get too familiar with the spiritual realities in our lives and stop being aware. We don't pay attention to the reality that our entertainment intake has deteriorated. Or, maybe our Bible reading has slacked off. Or, maybe an addiction has crept into our life. Or, maybe an attitude has entrenched in our heart. Or, maybe a prejudice has lodged in our heart. Or, maybe a lie has embedded in our mind. Or, maybe our joy is gone. Or, maybe our love for God has waned. Or, maybe we are treating the people close to us like furniture—they are nice to have but they are always there and need no special care. Or, maybe we are not paying attention to our adversary.

1 Peter 5:8 says this: “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

Take a look around your life. The people who get in trouble are the people who are not aware of what is happening near them—and in them.