

HOUSE OF GOD



GUARD YOUR STEPS

WATCH YOUR MOUTH

OUTLINE ... (Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 ESV)

GENERAL DIRECTIVE: GUARD YOUR STEPS IN WORSHIP BY KEEPING WATCH OVER YOUR MOUTH.

1. We guard our steps in worship by drawing near to listen, 5:1.

- (Ecclesiastes 5:1 ESV) **Guard your steps when you go to the house of God.** To draw near to listen is better than to offer **the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.**

Guard ... šâmar ... to keep watch over; properly, to hedge about (as with thorns), i.e. guard; generally, to protect, attend to; be circumspect, take heed to, to keep.

Steps ... literally foot – the part of the leg below the ankle joint of humans or animals.

A. We guard our steps when we obey God in our worship by drawing near to listen.

B. Those who do not go to the house of God to draw near to listen are fools.

C. Offering the sacrifice of fools identifies them as fools.

D. The sacrifice of fools is to draw near to God by speaking (singing, etc.) words (**drawing near with their mouths**) and **not** drawing near to listen.

- (Isaiah 29:13 ESV) And the Lord said: **“Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men.”**

E. **The fool is not taught reverence for God by God but by other humans.**

F. There are **two tragic results** from the sacrifice of fools—one implicit and one explicit.

i. The **implicit tragic result** is that they only hear themselves and the teachings of other humans.

- (Isaiah 29:13b NIV) **Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.**

ii. The **explicit tragic result** is that they are doing evil and are blind to it.

G. When we draw near to God to listen, he will draw near to us.

- (James 4:8a ESV) **Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.**

H. We guard our steps in worship and service by guarding our mouth and our lips.

- (Psalm 141:3-4 ESV) **Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!** 4 Do not let my heart incline to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds in company with men who work iniquity, and let me not eat of their delicacies!
- (Psalm 39:1 ESV) I said, **“I will guard my ways,** that I may not sin with my tongue; **I will guard my mouth with a muzzle,** so long as the wicked are in my presence.”

I. When we guard our lips, our lips will guard our knowledge.

- (Proverbs 5:1-2 ESV) My son, **be attentive to my wisdom;** incline your ear to my understanding, 2 that you may keep discretion, **and your lips may guard knowledge.**
- (Malachi 2:6-7 ESV) True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. 7 **For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge,** and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.
- (1 Timothy 6:20-21 ESV) O Timothy, **guard the deposit entrusted to you.** Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge,” 21 for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you.

2. We guard our steps in worship by not being quick with our words and impulsive with our heart, 5:2.

- (Ecclesiastes 5:2 NIV) **Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart** to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.

A. Do not be quick to say anything.

B. Do not be overly eager or impatient in your heart to say anything before God.

C. Discipline yourself to give careful thought and consideration before vocalizing the impulses of your heart.

Solomon gives us *two helpful instructions* to help us avoid being quick with our words and impulsive in expressing the thoughts of our hearts before God.

D. First helpful instruction: Keep in mind that God is God and we are not.

God is in heaven and we are on earth. The name of God here is Elohim. He is not only in heaven but he created heaven and rules over heaven and earth.

E. Second helpful instruction: Limit your words when drawing near to God.

JAMES, THE BROTHER OF JESUS, GIVES US A NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE ON HEARING THE WORDS OF GOD.

3. We guard our steps in worship by being quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to get angry, James 1:19-20.

- (James 1:19–20 ESV) Know this, my beloved brothers: **let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger**; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

A. First, James tells us two things we must know if we are to hear what God says.

- We must know** that we are to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.
- We must know** that our anger does not produce the righteousness of God.

B. Second, we need to get rid of the filth and evil in our lives that would keep us from humbly accepting the word of God.

- (James 1:21 NLT) So **get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives**, and **humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts**, for it has the power to save your souls.

C. And, third, we must have a disciplined attitude to listen with the intent of obedience.

- (James 1:22 NLT) But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. **Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.**
 - This is much different than merely listening.
 - This involves commitment and counting the cost and trusting God's direction through his word.

Often in studying this passage in James the focus turns so much on the importance of *doing*

and *not hearing only* that we overlook James's first emphasis on humbly accepting the word. So first things first ... we need to make sure that we do hear and receive the word.

And then we must listen with the intent to obey, or we are fooling ourselves. We should now be able to deduce that listening without the intent to obey is the sacrifice of fools.

- (Ecclesiastes 5:1 ESV) Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. **To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.**

4. We guard our steps in worship by not allowing busy lives to give us a fool's voice, 5:3.

- (Ecclesiastes 5:3 ESV) For a dream comes with much business, **and a fool's voice with many words.**
- (Ecclesiastes 5:3 NLT) Too much activity gives you restless dreams; **too many words make you a fool.**
- (Ecclesiastes 5:3 NIV) A dream comes when there are many cares, **and many words mark the speech of a fool.**

This is the "too busy" person who has a knowledge of the word—possibly a great knowledge—but his or her knowledge has become unfruitful.

- (Mark 4:18–19 ESV) And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, **19 but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.**

This "too busy" person who speaks about God or the word of God from their unfruitful position sounds like a fool ... as one who speaks for God but hasn't listened to God ... just as the prophets in Jeremiah.

- (Jeremiah 23:21–22 NLT) I have not sent these prophets, yet **they run around claiming to speak for me. I have given them no message, yet they go on prophesying. 22 If they had stood before me and listened to me, they would have spoken my words, and they would have turned my people from their evil ways and deeds.**

The one who speaks for God is always concerned about turning God's people from their sins. The one who speaks the oracles of God will do this because he has first listened to God.

- (1 Peter 4:10–11a ESV) As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: 11 **whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God.**

This ineffective, unfruitful person is so nearsighted that he is blind but speaks as though he has sight—this is the fool’s voice.

- (2 Peter 1:8–9a ESV) For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, **they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.** 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is **so nearsighted that he is blind.**

5. We guard our steps in worship by doing what we say we will do, 5:4-6.

- (Ecclesiastes 5:4–6 ESV) When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, **for he has no pleasure in fools.** Pay what you vow. 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. 6 **Let not your mouth lead you into sin,** and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?
- (Psalm 50:14 NLT) Make thankfulness your sacrifice to God, **and keep the vows you made to the Most High.**
- (Matthew 5:37 ESV) Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; **anything more than this comes from evil.**
- (James 5:12 ESV) But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, **but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.**

A. When you tell God you will do something, then do it without delay.

B. Don’t be a fool who makes excuses and rationalizes.

A religious person who makes a commitment to God while not honoring God as God *is a fool.* *God has no pleasure in fools.*

- (Psalm 14:1a ESV) **The fool says in his heart,** “There is **no God.**”

C. It is better to commit nothing to God than to commit and not follow through.

The person who speaks before prayerful consideration allows their mouth to lead them into sin as they try to later rationalize their decision as merely a mistake. Even the sound of this person’s voice provokes God’s anger.

God may destroy what a person has done because of the noncommittal attitude on other things. In other words someone who does not fulfill their commitment to God sometimes brings irreparable damage to other areas of their service and ministry to God.

PURPOSE: *WE GUARD OUR STEPS TO DRAW NEARER AND NEARER TO GOD IN OUR WORSHIP AND SERVICE.*

GOAL: *WE GUARD OUR STEPS TO LIVE IN THE FEAR OF GOD.*

6. We guard our steps in worship by choosing to live in awe, dread, fear and reverence before God, 5:7.

- (Ecclesiastes 5:7 ESV) For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is **vanity;** but God is the one you must **fear.**

Review ... vanity ... hebel ... vapor, breath ... meaninglessness ... the quality of having no value or significance; as a result of being futile or insubstantial or absurd or incomprehensible.

CHOOSE VANITY—>OR CHOOSE TO FEAR GOD

A. Not guarding our steps is choosing vanity ...

Not guarding our steps ... is by default choosing to live in a world that exists only in our minds—what we imagine the good life to be. But this is only a world of deception ... a dream world.

The Preacher describes this as vanity—a mere breath or vapor ... empty of true life but filled with meaninglessness, foolishness, despair, disappointment and ultimately judgment.

B. Guarding our steps is choosing to fear God ...

Guarding our steps ... is choosing to draw near to God by humbling ourselves to hear him and receive life from him. This is the abundant life Jesus promises and provides.

- (John 10:10 NIV) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; **I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.**