

God Is Calling Out Night Watchmen

When most of us think of the wee hours of the morning, we think of sleep. However, many believers, whether because of insomnia, physical pain, a small baby or a vocation that requires a night-shift sleep schedule, have experienced being awake in the night. Rather than being times of anxiety or stress, these can become times of encounter with the beauty of God. This is not a new idea, as the people of God have a long history of encountering God during the night.

We see this recorded in the lives of heroes of the faith throughout the Bible.

- Abraham: “When the sun went down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot with a flaming torch passed between these pieces” (Gen. 15:17).
- Jacob: “Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him there until daybreak” (Gen. 32:24).
- Samuel: “At that time, Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyes had begun to grow weak that he could not see), and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called to Samuel, and he answered, ‘Here I am’ (1 Sam. 3:2-4).
- Daniel. “Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven” (Dan. 2:19).

We see it especially in the times Jesus spent all night in prayer to God (see Luke 6:12), and when Paul and Silas worshiped in prison at the midnight hour (Act 16:25). We see this in the history of prayer throughout the centuries—the

monks in Bangor, Ireland and St. Maurice, Switzerland; the Moravians in Herrnhut, Germany; and the countless men and women through the ages who made rising at night to pray part of their daily routine.

In the present day, some believers are regularly awakened in the night and spend that time interacting with the Lord through prayer, singing and meditation on the Word. Others have set aside a day every week or a created a habit of getting up early every morning to spend those hours with the Lord. Some have taken time off from school or work to change their sleep schedule for a few months and spend the night in prayer.

While attending a conference as a teenager, I was introduced to the idea of “watching” in the night in a corporate setting. Around midnight I sat in a large sanctuary with others scattered around and encountered the stillness that comes when there is nothing else to do, nowhere else to go besides that room, and no one to talk to besides Jesus. Little did I know that in just a couple of years this would become my occupation!

When IHOPKC began in 1999, I was in the prayer room daily during the evenings. At midnight, a group of mostly 18–25-year-olds would come in to begin what we later named the NightWatch, the shift from midnight to 6 a.m. Their primary focus was singing songs about who God is and giving Him adoration. I found myself staying later and later, and finally joined them permanently as an official “NightWatcher.”

There are several verses in Psalms that beautifully sum up the occupation of someone who watches in the night.

Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who by night stand in the house of the Lord (Ps. 134:1).

My hands I will lift up unto Your commandments, which I have

loved; I will meditate on Your statutes (Ps. 119:48).

From these verses, I gather that an important purpose of watching through the night is to bless the Lord and meditate on His Word. Our task as a NightWatch is simple. Look at God. Connect with Him through His Word. Tell Him how glorious He is, and do it with strength.

The simplicity of this task has at times presented some challenges. Even though the nighttime contains few things to distract, it is still tempting to find ways to be busy, to give in to anxiety or to let the apparent sameness of each night lead to a sense of boredom and myopia, losing the perspective found in searching out the greatness of God. When this happens, I've found it helpful to return again to these simple ways to behold and bless the Lord in the night:

Behold His Beauty

Take Scriptures that describe who God is, what He thinks or how He feels and meditate on them, speaking and singing these passages from the Bible back to Him, phrase by phrase. I especially enjoy passages from the Psalms and Isaiah, as well as the first chapters of John, Colossians and Hebrews, which all contain rich truths about who Jesus is.

Behold His Plan

Reading and meditating on the plan of the Father to redeem a people for Himself and to bring all things together in His Son has encouraged my heart so many times. I love to sing about and think about the coming of Jesus to rule and reign over the earth, making all the wrong things right. I think the night is a particularly great time to be reminded that we are longing for the coming of Jesus, our bridegroom King.

My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning (Ps. 130:6).

“But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Look, the bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet him!’ (Matt. 25:6).

Cry Out for God’s Righteousness

In Luke 18, Jesus tells us that God will avenge His own elect who cry out to Him day and night. In the night, I love praying for God’s purposes to be accomplished in the church, Israel and the nations of the earth. In the night, we have a unique opportunity to pray for dreams and visions for those many who are sleeping and to ask God to push back spiritual darkness by interceding for the ending of many evil activities that take place during the literal darkness of the night.

Whether you are a person who occasionally prays during the night hours or someone whose occupation is to pray through the night, you are part of a company of people who, like the night watchmen who guarded a city, are awake in the night attentively looking at and for the Lord. Our primary occupation is to look at the God who is beautiful and beyond comprehension and give Him our affections, our time, our thoughts. He will truly satisfy us with Himself.

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