

## Appendix:

R. Kent Hughes writes that "Some years ago a young man approached the foreman of a logging crew and asked for a job. 'That depends', replied the foreman, 'Let's see you fell this tree'. The young man stepped forward and skilfully felled a great tree. Impressed, the foreman exclaimed, 'Start Monday!'. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday rolled by, and on Thursday afternoon the foreman approached the young man and said, 'You can pick up your pay check on the way out today'. Startled, he replied, 'I thought you paid on Friday'. 'Normally we do', answered the foreman, 'but we're letting you go today because you've fallen behind. Our daily felling charts show that you've dropped from first place on Monday to last on Wednesday'. 'But I'm a hard worker', the young man objected, 'I arrive first, leave last, and even have worked through my coffee breaks!'. The foreman, sensing the boy's integrity, thought for a minute and then asked, 'Have you been sharpening your axe?'. The young man replied, 'I've been working too hard to take the time'.

The Morning Watch is a necessity, meeting with God in the morning to sharpen our spiritual lives. It is the most Biblical of practices and the most beneficial of practices, but practically how do you do it? Here are some helps that I have gleaned over the years:

Watchman Nee writes...

- a) To rise early, one needs to go to sleep early. Don't burn the candle on both ends.
- b) Do not set too high a standard for rising early. Take a moderate course. To set too high a standard will produce a bad conscience and we need to maintain a conscience without offence. We do not advocate extremes.
- c) It is inevitable that one will meet some difficulty in the first few days of early rising. He will love his bed and find it hard to climb out. It takes some time to establish a habit. In the beginning one has to force oneself to rise, but after a while he can get up early without effort. Human nerves are like the tree on the hilltop that bends in the direction of the wind. If it is blown always in one direction, it develops the habit of leaning in that direction. Suppose you have the habit of rising late. It is like having your nerve bent northward. But after you try to rise up early many times, your nerve will begin to turn its direction southward. Then, instead of it being difficult to get up early, you will find it hard to get up late, for you cannot sleep any longer! Until that habit is formed, though, ask God for grace...(and) try it many times; do it again and again. Daily learn to desert your bed and get up early until you have formed the habit of rising early to enjoy the grace of morning communion with God.

Here is an experiment suggested by Gordon MacDonald in his book 'Ordering Your Private World'...

"After reading an article by a specialist on the subject of sleep, I began to experiment to find out how much sleep I needed. The writer suggested that one can determine his sleep requirements by setting his alarm for a certain hour and rising at that hour for three mornings in a row. Then the alarm should be set ten minutes earlier for the next three days. By so continuing in three-day increments, setting the alarm back ten minutes in each period, one will finally come to a natural fatigue point, where throughout the following day he does not feel properly rested. I tried it, found I could rise much earlier than I had thought, and it added almost two full hours - valuable hours - onto my day".

Why not try it and see how much of your best hours; your morning hours, you can give to the Lord?

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# "The Morning Watch"



*How do you spend the morning hours?*

*by Pastor David Legge*

# “The Morning Watch”

Let’s look at verse 3 of Psalm 5, this is just one of the verses I want to point out. We’ll look at quite a number of verses from the Scriptures, but we’ll just use this one verse to be a springboard for our contemplations:

*‘My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD;  
in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up’.*

There is a great need, I believe, in this modern church age in which we live, an age of modern technology, an age of slick programmes, an age of emphasis on professionalism, to reassess what really matters in the life of the church and in the life of individual believers, Christians. We need to reassess what really brings blessing to the people of God, what we really need if we’re going to know true success before God - and I use that phrase ‘success’ advisedly, because there is such a thing as ‘true success’ in the word of God, but it’s not always as we quantify it today; as numbers, as professionalism, as excellence. If we ever as the church of Jesus Christ where He has called us to be a witness; and if we are ever, as individual Christians, going to succeed for God in a biblical sense, it is essential for us to go back to our roots and examine where we came from, and get back to basics.

I hope you understand what I’m saying today. If we feel, perhaps, that in our own personal lives, and as the church - perish the thought - that we have lost our way, it is imperative for us to go back to basics, to examine our roots, to go back to the first principles of Christ - if you like, the ABCs of Christian discipleship - and ask ourselves: are we still practising these things, and is it the absence of these things that are the reasons for the absence of blessing in our lives?

Now in this little study we’re looking at ‘The Morning Watch’. S.D. Gordon, who was a great devotional writer, wrote these words, I quote: ‘*A life of victory and power hinges upon three things: one, an act; two, a purpose; three, a habit. An initial act, a fixed purpose, a daily habit*’. Now that initial act that Gordon was talking about was the act of personal surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ, when you come to faith in the Saviour at that hour of salvation. But then that purpose that he’s talking about, a fixed purpose, is to obey the Lord as a believer in whatever He tells us to do. So there is an initial act, there’s a fixed purpose, and then he talked about a daily habit. If we’re to know power, vitality and success in the Christian life, we not only have that initial act of salvation, and that purpose in our minds that is

*and he with me*’. Here’s an individual who heard His voice, and from that hour hearing His voice wrote this prayer of the experience that she had in the presence of the Lord Jesus that was second to none. Read this poem carefully as I close with it, it’s called ‘The Grey Dawn’:

*‘At the grey dawn, while yet the world is sleeping,  
And the sweet matins of the birds begin,  
One who hath held me in His holy keeping  
Standeth at my threshold waiting to come in.*

*Oft had He knocked to give me gentle warning,  
My heart seemed willing, but my flesh how weak!  
Until one morning, O that blessed morning,  
When my own name I heard Him speak.*

*Yes, t’was my name - no other voice could speak it  
To stir my heart and melt my very soul.  
And I rose so quickly to obey it:  
Flung wide the door and gave Him full control.*

*O, then I feasted on divinest beauty,  
The altogether lovely loving One,  
While blessing me through radiance round each duty,  
That in His name should on that day be done.*

*Peace fell upon, while to Him I listened,  
And in that secret hour I talked with Christ  
As ne’er before, and we together christened  
With tears of joy, new joy, our sacred tryst.*

*Can I afford to miss such rare communion?  
To let the health of my own soul decline?  
May Christ forbid, His grace secured the union,  
While I am truly His, as He is mine’.*

Is your morning hour given to God? For if it is, I tell you as one who has practiced it, and one who has failed many times in it and missed out from it: it makes the world of difference to begin the day with God. Can I ask you: did you meet God this morning? Did you? It is that why there’s an absence of power and vitality and joy in your Christian life? It’s very easy to rectify - set the alarm tomorrow morning and meet with Him, and what a difference it will make!

When did the Lord Jesus meet those bitterly disappointed and downcast disciples? When it was the breaking of the day, they noticed Him in the dim dawn light, someone standing on the beach. Now I have given you loads of examples of how the morning is the most biblical practice to wait upon God; how it is the most beneficial practice where God has chosen to meet us, and where God has promised to bless us before the world awakes, before our minds and our hearts are filled with all the distractions of a busy day - to give the best time to God, do not underestimate it! Please do not miss the difference that makes.

Several years ago my wife Barbara give me a poem entitled 'The Difference', and you might have heard it or read it, you might have it. I want to finish with two poems, this one first. It goes like this:

*'I got up early one morning and  
rushed right into the day;  
I had so much to accomplish that  
I didn't have time to pray*

*Problems just tumbled about me,  
and the heavier came each task.  
"Why doesn't God help Me?" I wondered.  
He answered, "You didn't ask".*

*I wanted to see joy and beauty,  
but the day toiled on, gray and bleak;  
I wondered why God didn't show me.  
He said, "But you didn't seek".*

*I tried to come into God's presence;  
I used all my keys at the lock.  
God gently and lovingly chided,  
"My child, you didn't knock".*

*I woke up early this morning,  
and paused before entering the day;  
I had so much to accomplish  
that I had to take time to pray'.*

Do you take time to pray in the morning? Do you hear the sound of the nail-pierced hand knocking, and the voice saying to you: *'Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear my voice and open the door I will come into him and sup with him,*

fixed to obey the Lord in whatever He says, but we need to have a daily habit. That daily habit is meeting with the Lord, day by day.

### *Do you observe the morning watch?*

S.D. Gordon said, in summing up what he mentioned before, *'After the initial act of surrender, the secret of a strong winsome Christian life is in spending time daily alone with God over His word'*. Now here's the question: do you observe the morning watch? Early in the morning, are you found pouring over the word of God, praying to God and bringing your needs to Him in prayer? You might say: 'Well, that's elementary, every Christian should be engaged in such an act', and that is true - but my question to you today is: are you engaged in it? What an obvious mistake, you might think, for a Christian of all people to stop reading their Bible, to stop praying, to stop meeting with God in the morning - but the fact of the matter is: many of us are defeated as Christians because we do not observe this basic in the Christian life. We do not come daily before the Lord and meet with God.

The reason for many of us is that we are too busy to pray, but you know those great saints of God that we read of in the Scriptures and we read of in Christian history were not too busy to pray - in fact they were too busy not to pray! The morning watch was such an essential thing in their lives that Watchman Nee, for one example, said *'No Bible, no breakfast'*. 'If I get up this morning and I don't have time to read my Bible, well then I don't have any breakfast until I get to that place where I'm pouring over my Bible before God and bringing my prayers to the throne of grace'.

Martin Luther was a very busy man, in fact he was busy with the Reformation affairs in the whole of Europe, but he said these words: *'If I fail to spend'* - and I'm not laying down a specific time for any of you, but this is just what he said - *'If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day. I've so much business I cannot get on without three hours, at times, daily in prayer'*. He goes on to say: *'If I should neglect prayer but a single day, I should lose a great deal of the fire of faith'*. That's what Luther said, a man who turned Europe upside down for Christ - but here's my question to you in the light of his testimony, and the testimony of Scripture: have any of us lost the fire of faith, the vitality of our Christian lives, the power, the victory? Could it be because the morning watch is neglected?

Now please note, I'm not talking specifically about Bible reading. I'm not talking

about praying – I’ve done plenty of talking about praying and Bible reading in the past. I’m not even talking about what has been commonly called today ‘the quiet time’, which is an expression that was used in a valid sense when it was first christened, but now I believe has got out of all control, and people think that ‘the quiet time’ is to just read a portion of Scripture and get through the Bible in a year or two years or whatever, and then pray through a list and bring your needs to God - that is not what I’m talking about. I’m talking about meeting with God, specifically meeting with God in the morning.

The necessary ingredient of a life of victory and power in the Lord Jesus Christ is a life, not reading the Bible or praying, it is a life of communion with the Lord Jesus Christ that will bring you into the immediate presence of God. It is the morning watch, it is what saints of God in bygone eras called ‘the trysting time’. You might think that’s rather an archaic name, and I suppose it is, because it’s an old word for a time and a place where lovers used to meet. You would arrange to meet under such-and-such a tree, or at the corner of such-and-such a street with the one that you were courting. There is to be a time, and there is to be a place in all our lives - and I believe the biblical time is the morning, and I’ll show you this in a moment - but there is to be that time when we meet with Jesus, the Lover of our souls, and to His bosom we fly!

Is there that place? Others called it ‘the still hour’, ‘the quiet hour’, the title we take for this booklet is ‘the morning watch’. The name is a historic one, ‘the morning watch’, in fact the name is a biblical one. It’s directly suggested by David in the verse that we read, Psalm 5 verse 3: ‘*O Lord, in the morning shalt thou hear my voice; in the morning will I order my prayer unto thee*’. It was held through the saints of all the ages that the morning was God’s appointed time to meet Him. Murray M’Cheyne put it like this: ‘*I ought to pray before seeing anyone. I feel it is far better to begin with God, to see His face first, to get my soul near Him before it is near another*’.

Now is this the modern day practice of the church of Jesus Christ, and individual Christians? The morning watch? To see the face of Jesus before we see any other face? We uphold men like David who said: ‘*Evening, and morning, and afternoon will I pray and cry aloud and seek Your face*’; we uphold the apostles who went up to the synagogue early in the morning to pray; we uphold the Lord Jesus who was found early in the morning in the place of prayer; we uphold men like Murray M’Cheyne and Martin Luther - but as E.M. Bounds says on that very light: ‘*We build these men’s tombs and write their epitaphs, but we are careful not to follow their examples!*’. Do we follow their examples of the morning watch?

*week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre*’. Now please note that in Mark’s gospel 16 verse 1 it says that Mary, the other Mary, and Mary the mother of Jesus came at the rising of the sun - but it says here that Mary Magdalene came while it was yet dark. She had an arranged appointment to go with the other two Marys, but she couldn’t wait until that, so she rose up early in the morning when it was still dark, and she went to anoint the body of our Lord Jesus Christ with those spices. We read that when she got to the tomb there was no one there. She went back and told Peter and the disciples, and as they ran back to the other disciples we read that she stayed there, and she stood beside the empty tomb weeping, thinking of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then the angel came to her and said: ‘*Woman, why weepest thou?*’. She said: ‘*They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him*’. Verse 14: ‘*When she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him*’, this is beautiful, she doesn’t even name Him because there’s only one man in her life, ‘*Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master*’ - O my Master!

When did she meet the Master? Can I correct that - when did the Master choose to meet her? Early in the morning, she could go away and truly say:

*‘I have seen the face of Jesus,  
Tell me not of aught beside;  
I have heard the voice of Jesus,  
All my soul is satisfied’.*

In the next chapter, chapter 21, we see seven disciples this time. Verse 1: ‘*After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing*’. Now do you know what that statement was? ‘I’ve had it with this Christian lark. Christ is dead, our promises are buried, there is no hope. The fishing that I left to follow Christ to be fishers of men, I will return to because there is no hope’. ‘*They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus*’.

*there came back no answer*'. It was her trysting time with her beloved, and the verses following tell us because of her reluctance in sleep to rise, the desired interview with her Beloved was missed. As we read on in this story we find that she suffered defeat in her contact with the world that day because she had not had that sweet communion with her Beloved.

### *It is the most beneficial of practices*

This is the most biblical of practices, but let me show you also that it is the most beneficial of practices. Now mark this please, this statement: God has chosen the early morning hour for giving special blessings to men. I hope I've shown you that already from the word of God, but let me show you it more: Jacob at Jabok, crossing that ford of Jabok, and there he is a wicked twisted man, just what his name says. He needed to be changed, he needed to have a touch from God, and you remember what happened: there he was, and he was awakened at midnight, during the night, perhaps thinking that one of Esau's men had come and ambushed him, and he turns and he wrestles with this figure - and we know that it was an angelic figure. He wrestles, it says, into the early hours of the morning; and at that point of the morning that supernatural figure touched his thigh and he became weak, and Jacob is heard to utter these words: 'I will not let you go until you bless me' - and it was at that early hour of the dawning of the day that God blessed him. He was given the name 'Israel', a prince with God and with men, and that place was called 'Peniel', the face of God, because it was there in the early hour of the morning that he looked into the face of God.

What about Moses in Exodus chapter 33 and 34? He has the burden of the sin of the people, their idolatry and all their iniquity. He has had the awful experiences that we read about in that book, trying to lead the people of God. But as he prays to God, he asks this prayer: 'Lord, show me Thy glory' - is that not a prayer that all of us desire? 'Lord, that I would have more power, that I would have more consciousness of You in my life' - what does the Lord say to him? Exodus 34:2: *'Be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto mount Sinai, and present thyself there to me in the top of the mount'* - did Moses keep his morning appointment with God? Yes, he did, and it says: *'and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up'*, and he got such a glimpse of the glory of God, what happened? As he came down that mountain after spending much time with God in His presence, it says that his face shone and all the people could see it, though he was unconscious of it!

In John 20 we have Mary Magdalene on resurrection morning: *'The first day of the*

Now please note, before I go on any further, what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that the morning is the only time to meet God, that is not what I'm saying. Some people, I'll not name anybody, are not morning people - the fact of the matter is, they're grumpy in the morning, it takes them a couple of hours to wake up and the morning is not so conducive to them. I'm not saying that your main 'quiet time' has to always, by some rule or regulation, be the morning. Some people work shifts, and it would be impossible almost for them to meet God, in some sense, in the morning. Some people are ill, and they're not feeling well in the morning, and it takes them a little time to get body and soul together before they can meet with the Lord. I'm not talking about those specific instances, but the principle that I'm espousing is this: we ought to begin the day with God. Whatever our day is, however it begins, as far as it is physically, emotionally and spiritually possible, and however short that time may be - you may take your main quiet time later on in the day, I'm not saying that you can't do that or you shouldn't, but I am saying that we should at least, as soon as the day dawns, have a time with God - because it makes the difference.

Men of God have testified that it makes the difference, and I'm not talking about legalism now - don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I'm not putting myself or yourself into bondage, I'm not saying you must do this or you should do this, rather I'm saying - mark it - you need this! You will perhaps even come to a place in your life, if you begin to practice this, where you will want this - there will not be a bondage, but it will be blessing; it won't be penance, it will be a privilege to get up and lift your voice to God in the morning. Let me give you this basic in two titles: one, the morning watch is the most biblical of practices; and two, the morning watch is the most beneficial of practices.

### *It is the most Biblical of practices*

Let's take the first: it is the most biblical of practices. Now we don't have time to go into all this, let me just say that if you were to go to Genesis 19, Abraham rose early in the morning to meet with God. In Genesis 28 Jacob did the same; in Exodus 8, 9, 24 and 34 Moses did it; in Joshua 3, 6, 7 and 8 Joshua rose early in the morning; Gideon in Judges 6; Hannah in 1 Samuel 1; Samuel in 1 Samuel 15; David in 1 Samuel 17; Job in chapter 1 verse 5; the apostles in Acts 5:21; Mary in Luke 24, Mark 16, John 20 and our Lord Jesus Christ - who is our supreme example and gives us the power to live like Him, in Mark chapter 1 and verse 34.

Let's look to that portion for a moment - Mark 1:34, and it says: *'He healed many*

*that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him. And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee'. Now just imagine the scene please, the Lord Jesus has been busy all the day before healing the sick, making blind eyes to see, doing mighty miraculous works before men. The crowd is around about Him, everybody is thronging Him, everybody wants Him, they're pushing up against Him in the press; and the nightfall comes and He goes and retires to His bed - and almost like a voice to Samuel in the night, He hears the voice of His heavenly Father, and He arises. There is none other arisen in the house, no one else in the town is awake, and carefully He gets out of His bed and He walks on tiptoes to the door of that house. He lifts the latch and closes it gently, and He goes out into that same street, past the same houses where people were thronging after Him from. He goes into the countryside, and then into the fields; and He sees a crevice, perhaps, in a rock that is nearby - and there He gets upon his knees and He faces God in heaven, and He cries to Him for power! Not another soul around Him - no one sees it - but there He is, the Son of God in the morning watch.*

Now this is biblical, the statement 'the morning watch' goes right back to ancient times, where city walls were guarded. The guards would stay up all night and take shifts in order to protect the city. In the earliest times the morning watch was divided into three watches. There was a watch from 6pm to 10, then there was a watch from 10 to 2, and then again there was the watch from 2 to 6am - those three watches. In Roman times, in the days of our Lord Jesus and the disciples, the division was into four watches of the night. The first watch was from 6, tea-time, 6pm through to 9pm, that was the evening watch; then there was the midnight watch which was from 9pm to 12 midnight; and then there was the cock-crowing watch from midnight to 3am; and then there is what is called the morning watch from 3am to 6am. Now it is interesting that in the Bible it's constantly repeated that the Lord keeps the nightly watch over His children - what am I talking about? When you're asleep and when I'm asleep, and when the children of Israel were asleep in the Old Testament, it was the Lord who would keep them during the night - He was watching over them, Psalm 121: *'The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night'*. He watched over them, in fact Psalm 127 verse 1 which says: *'Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it'*, also says, *'except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain'*. The word for

'keep', 'except the Lord keep the city', is the same word for 'watchmen'. So you could translate it like this: 'Except the Lord watches the city, what is the point in the watchmen watching it, if the Lord is not over it?'

Why am I telling you all this? It's simply this: there was this idea in the Old Testament and, I believe, the New Testament that the Lord was watching over His people all through the night, the watches of the night, and then out of respect and reverence for Him and devotion, out of a heart of love - before, as it were, the final watch was over where the Lord was taking care of them, they would rise out of their bed and come to meet with God. Do you understand this? It's as if the Lord is saying: 'I've been watching over you all the night while you've slept, and I wish that you would give me the refreshment of a quiet bit of talk and fellowship with you before the day begins'.

Isaiah chapter 50 tells us about this in verse 4: *'The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he'* - speaking of God - *'wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned'*. That is a morning appointment with God, and it is at His special request. Look who is waking us up! It is the Lord who is waking us up in the morning. It is daily: 'he wakeneth morning by morning'. Look at the results of it: a trained ear, a trained tongue, a life of helpfulness, a life of power, a life of victory - and it's early in the morning, because the Lord has to waken us up.

Let me show you another illustration of this in allegory in the Song of Songs 5. I believe Song of Songs not only is a typology of the church of Jesus Christ and the Lord Jesus Christ, but also an allegory of the Christian in communion with the person of the Lord Jesus. I think that is perhaps primarily what it is, the love relationship that we have with Him. Here you have the bride, as the church or as the individual Christian, and she says in verse 2: *'I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocks, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night'*. So here is the Bridegroom knocking on the door, and He is damp because of the dew of the early morning, and He wants entrance into the bridal chamber. He says: *'I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. I rose up'* - but notice, she waited for a while, and then she rose up - *'to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed...I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but*