

Songs In The Night

Job 35:10

PREPARED BY
KEN GEHRELS
PASTOR
CALVIN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF OTTAWA
ONTARIO, CANADA

It is something that, when you have it, you easily take it for granted. But when it eludes you - oh, how sorely you miss it. And quickly know it, too.

Sleep - taking up roughly about a third of our life, at least for most people. Meaning, as Abraham Kuyper suggested, somewhat tongue in cheek, that if you are 30 years old, you've really only lived for about 20 years. Dozed the rest away (*Near Unto God*, p.61 1925 edition).

Sleep - a chance for our bodies to recharge, and our minds to be still. Coming, for most of us, in the dark of night. Head on the pillow. Body stretched out. We slip away. And before we know it, light peeks around the curtains and it is morning again. A new day lays ahead, and we can face it with recharged batteries.

Sounds all wonderful when you say it this way.

Not always, however, how it happens. Some folks find themselves spending significant periods of night time staring at the ceiling. Or tossing and turning.

I tend to be a bit sleep challenged, sometimes more than others, and know that others among you face the same thing. They tell me it happens more when you get older. Suppose I'll find that out whenever that fateful time arrives :-)

What happens in the night?

What happens when you lay there, awake at 3am?

What happens in that darkest and coldest hour of the day?

Some of you know, from hard personal experience.

You've laid there while the minutes stretched out - each one like an hour, or more.

You've laid there while all the pitfalls and hiccups and pains and errors of days past race through your mind.

You've laid there and experienced each minor obstacle of yesterday turn into a potential mountain awaiting you tomorrow.

You've experienced little challenges turn into virtually impassable roadblocks.

You've perhaps felt like each personality trait was a weakness, and each weakness a reason for your own rejection.

What's going on?

In the dark and quiet of the night we easily feel alone.

And we easily feel very vulnerable.

In the dark you can't see very well or very far.
You can't do an awful lot.
You can't talk to anyone.
You don't go anywhere.
Which is what makes us feel small.

And so , you're stuck - right there.
Just you and the problem.
Which grows by the minute into this giant gorilla.

Later, in the morning, after coffee #2, and you're well into the daily routine, you look back and wonder why you made such a big deal about it.

But there - in the dark - those things take over.
They easily lay hold of us in our vulnerability, the vulnerability of the dark.

The 6th Psalm alludes to this sense of vulnerability when it speaks of being worn out by groaning, and flooding the bed with tears all night long.

Psalm 91:5 speaks of the terror of the night. Indeed, it is under the cover of darkness that much evil is committed - assaults, break-ins and robberies, enemy attacks. No wonder that one might feel a bit anxious, then, at that hour of the day.

And Job laments this experience of the long, dark night in 7:4, saying "*When I lie down I say, 'When shall I rise? But the night is long, and I am full of tossing until dawn.'*"

Feeling small in the dark.
Feeling overwhelmed in the dark.
Feeling alone in the dark.
Feeling powerless in the dark.

There's more people who experience this, at one time or another, than you may first realize. If you're one of them, be sure that you're not alone!

And also realize, being there - eyes wide open at 3am - doesn't have to be all bad. There can be a positive flip side to the whole business. It's a positive side spoken of by Elihu, a friend of the suffering man Job.

Elihu is in the middle of an impassioned rebuttal to Job's cry of pain, a cry in which there is a significant degree of indignation. I don't want to provide a final grade on Elihu's sense of empathy. Perhaps suffice it to say that it

would be a challenge to have him serve as your pastoral elder or deacon! Job has been crying out in bewilderment, feeling as if God has ripped him off; feeling as if he should have received a fairer shake, been dealt a better hand because of his righteous behaviour.

Elihu boldly states that perhaps Job should be quiet. There is no one who really deserved the title "righteous." And Job, says Elihu, shouldn't think so highly of his righteous behaviour. It's not that great. And the effects of it don't reach that far. Quite frankly, claims Elihu, God is not all that impressed by human claims to righteousness. And, really, when push comes to shove, there isn't much righteousness around. There aren't too many people who, when caught in a pinch, will reach out for God.

I'm not sure how much you want to make of Elihu's overall thesis, whether you want to side with him or against him. Or what, perhaps, you think of his pastoral methodology.

But this part I want to single out - verse 10, where the young Elihu speaks of
"God my maker, who gives strength in the night."

Sometimes people, in the middle of a jumbled ramble,
with more bramble than rose,
more sucker than fruit-bearing stem,
Sometimes they manage to say something profound.
Ah, they may in fact not even notice.
They may even move right along to more blubber and foolishness.
But there it is - the one jewel, surrounded by all that mud.

Here, in Job 35, there's a jewel laying in verse 10.
It's a descriptor of God:

"God my maker, who gives strength in the night."

For all of you who find yourselves caught in a struggle with sleeplessness, feeling small and feeling vulnerable, feeling the rush of present challenges and problems, and overwhelmed by so much of it -

let me present this jewel to you, wiped clean, and laid out on the platter of scripture.

"God my maker, who gives strength in the night."

Psalm 88 begins with this prayer:

*O Lord, God of my salvation,
when, at night, I cry out in your presence,
let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry.*

The psalm is entitled, "*Prayer for help in despondency*", and it seems to be a prayer penned in the vulnerable time of night. If you read that prayer you'll notice that it doesn't come with a nice, neat ending. There is no concluding benediction, no words of praise to tie everything neatly together, as happens in so many other psalms.

Yet, right there, in the middle of deep trouble, angst, and a profound sense of vulnerability, the Psalmist fires a prayer off to heaven.

Right there.

In the dark.

To - "*God my maker, who gives strength in the night.*"

One thing Elihu got right is this – God isn't in the business of being a cheer leader for those who are sure they've got the formula for a successful life all figured out. He's not about to function as a check-out bag boy for those on their way up the ladder of wealth.

Elihu slams any sense of, "*Hey God, you OWE me!*"

He's right.

God doesn't owe anyone.

He doesn't **have to** anything - for anyone.

But there **IS** more to God than this.

And unfortunately, Elihu **doesn't** go there.

He doesn't go on to speak of God's mercy and compassion for those who have a deep sense of their smallness, who feel overwhelmed, who know that they are weak.

I invite you to read of that side of God, shown to us through his son Jesus Christ during his ministry on earth. He comes to a person caught in perpetual night - blind Bartimaeus. The story is told in Mark 10. Bartimaeus is unable to provide for himself. He's stuck in poverty, pushed into the proverbial ditch along the road of life. And there he lays.

This little man, with nothing going for him, and nothing strong or positive to offer, hears that the Son of God is passing by. He calls out for mercy. The crowd tries to silence him - pushing him down again.

But Jesus hears that voice in the darkness.

Reaches out a hand. And heals.

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

There is no claim of position, or power, or right.

Just a call out of the darkness, a call for mercy, a call from a position of real weakness.

And that call is answered.

"God my maker, who gives strength in the night."

Tell me, when you experience times of sleeplessness, do you ever use them as times of prayer?

Perhaps in those times you are feeling the vulnerability or anxiety that I've spoken of.

Perhaps not.

But there you are - alone, in the dark.

You could fret over it.

Or you could pray.

Do you?

Prayers in the dark of night.

Perhaps prayers of confession of some sin that now replays itself in full colour with surround sound.

Perhaps a prayer seeking comfort.

Or perhaps a prayer of intercession on behalf of someone who's face appears before you at that moment.

Have you ever considered that if your thoughts turn towards someone during the night hours, that perhaps it might be the guidance of the Holy Spirit moving you towards intercession?

When we lay awake in our beds at night, or perhaps huddle at 2am in a living room chair with a quilt thrown around our shoulders, we are at our smallest.

And that, friends, is a very good position from which to pray.

Sort of like kneeling.

It brings us down.

It is when humility can rise to the surface.

Night time prayers - they are the stuff of Psalm 77:6:

*I commune with my heart in the night;
I meditate and search my spirit.*

They are what David writes about in Psalm 16:

*I bless the Lord who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.
I keep the Lord always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.*

Night time -

Next time you're left wide awake while your spouse is busy sawing wood, instead of cursing time wasted, or fretting about the monumental challenges that come into your mind, take this time as a quiet moment in what is far too often an all too busy life, and gently use it for prayer.

I'm not suggesting pulling out your prayer list, and making it a time of great activity and work.

Just take whatever comes your way at that time, and place it before God.

Lord, here's what I'm thinking. Will you please direct me when morning comes - to a good solution.

Lord, this is how I'm feeling. I don't know what to do with it. Please calm the storm for me.

Lord, here's the regret over what I've done. Forgive, I pray.

Lord, here's the person who's come to mind. Whatever their need, please provide manna in their wilderness.

Bring it to the throne of God.

Not because the words will be right - small chance of that at 2am, anyway!

Not because you're so worthy. Let me suggest that the vulnerability you sense in the dark is perhaps more indicative of where things really stand in your life than whatever bluster you can muster at morning coffee break.

Bring it to the throne of our Heavenly Father in the name of Jesus.

And leave it there.

Let me direct you again to Psalm 88. I said that it doesn't have a neat ending. Which can often be how our middle of the night prayers finish.

Without a pretty ribbon tied on.

Perhaps because we drift off to sleep - what a wonderful way to sleep, nestled close to your Lord in prayer!
Perhaps because we're not given an answer right there.
Perhaps that prayer is just one step in a much larger journey that God is taking you along.

Whatever the "perhaps" in your case, just leave the prayer there.
Leave the outcome to God.

Night time - a great time to act on the words of the old hymn -
What a friend we have in Jesus.
All our sins and griefs to bear.
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.
Oh, what peace we often forfeit.
Oh, what needless pain we bear.
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

To...

"God my maker, who gives strength in the night."