

The Role of a Spiritual Watchman

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by Henry Blackaby

The following is edited from a message given at the Midwest Prayer Conference of Harvest Prayer Ministries, in October 2006 at Maryland Community Church in Terre Haute, Indiana.

Every believer is called to be a spiritual watchman to some degree in his or her prayer life. It may be a watchman upon the walls of your family, or the walls of your church or your city, or God may entrust you with being a spiritual watchman on the walls of the nation. Some may have a more advanced calling in this aspect of their prayer life.

A spiritual watchman is one who has been uniquely equipped by God to see. In Matthew 13 God says that every believer has been given eyes to see and ears to hear. But a watchman has to be equipped by God to see what others do not see and he has a unique capacity to see when the enemy is invading. The enemy comes disguised, but a spiritual watchman is very alert and blows the trumpet and gives a sound so that family members can be quickly warned and not destroyed. Or he may be given spiritual eyes to see something that is happening in the life of the church. The watchman suddenly realizes that something has come in and there is turmoil and dissension and conflict.

A watchman doesn't just see and observe or hear. A watchman blows the trumpet. The watchman sounds the note: the enemy is

approaching! or the enemy has slipped in!

In history, the watchman on the walls carried with him the safety of the entire city. The city could sleep at night knowing the watchman was on the wall. If they, with the uniqueness of their sight and hearing, noticed that the enemy was creeping up to the wall, they could blow the trumpet, or the Scripture in Joel says, "lift up the ram's horn" and let the sound go out and give the warning so the people could ready themselves and not be taken unawares.

A Family Watchman

Let me give you an illustration. My wife is an unusual person in prayer although she would see herself as very ordinary. But I've noticed in the 46 years that we've been married and have had our children, that she has an unusual degree of being a spiritual watchwoman on the walls of our home, and I'm very alert to that. There are times when she hears from the Lord in ways that I have not heard. There came a time when three of our children were in university and they were driving 500 miles northwest for a student conference. It was wintertime. I remember Marilyn pulling the three boys aside and saying, "I don't want you to drive in the same car."

"Mom," they said, "why don't you want us to drive in the same car?"

"Well, you could be in an accident, and I don't want you all three in the same car. I have something in my spirit that is alerting me to warn you, don't ride together in the same car."

About 3 o'clock that winter Sunday afternoon when we knew the boys were driving back, I was taking a nap, and Marilyn came running in and grabbed me and said, "Get on your knees! Get on your knees! We've got to pray for our boys!" A spiritual

watchman knows a lot more than the rest of us. She somehow knew that there was a need for us to be deeply in prayer for the safety of our boys.

When they finally got home one said, "Mom, let me tell you what happened. We were driving home and we hit black ice. Our car began to spin and we missed an 18-wheeler by about five feet! We would have had a head-on collision and we would have all been killed. But somehow the car wheels grabbed and we went across into the ditch on the other side and the truck went by."

Marilyn asked, "What time was that?" It was exactly at the moment when we were on our knees praying for our sons.

A spiritual watchman holds in his or her hands life and death. It is as if God has equipped their eyes to see or ears to hear of danger and then has equipped them to know how to blow the horn and to give warning and to call us to pray.

I want to read two Scriptures and let the Scriptures speak from the heart of God. The first of these is from Joel 2:1. Joel was one of these whom God equipped to be a spiritual watchman on the walls of His people and especially when God Himself had seen the sin of God's people and had chosen to bring judgment upon them. In the book of Joel, God used nature to do it and He brought swarms of locusts and then He brought another devastating swarm of locusts and then He sent fire. God alerted Joel in a way that nobody else had quite heard. Listen to what God says and listen to the phrase, "the day of the Lord." In the Old Testament "the day of the Lord" was the day of God's judgment. When God comes against His people to judge them because of their sin it is called, "the day of the Lord." So listen to God's instruction to the prophet:

"Blow the trumpet in Zion..." – that is, in the midst of My people – "and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is

coming, for it is at hand....” When God was on the move to bring judgment on the people because of their sin, He alerted one of His own and heightened the capacity of that one to hear and to see.

Could I alert you to your role as a child of God? God has equipped you with spiritual eyes and ears, and it is not just for all the pleasantries, but there are times when God’s judgment is coming. The enemy may be at the door of your church or the enemy may have even slipped into the life of the church and the beautiful harmony and joy and love of the church is suddenly being disrupted. God gives you spiritual eyes to see where that is coming from and gives you the capacity to understand. If this is unchecked, it can destroy the church. You see it and hear it, but you may have a tendency to say, “That’s none of my business.” But you are a spiritual watchman on the walls of your church, and if you happen to see something or hear something that has the potential of great harm to the people of God, then listen to God. In your time of prayer God will surface that awareness and you will sense a burden. There may be even a kind of trembling that comes over you because you see where it is headed.

Then God says to you what He said to Joel: “Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm....” You might say, “I’ve never been a person who does that.” I haven’t been either, but when God orders it, then the life of His people is at stake, and I cannot keep quiet.

Does not Paul say that we can speak the truth in love? (Eph. 4:15). You don’t have to speak the truth in anger or rail at someone. You can seek out someone and give them counsel and let them know that you are aware of what is happening whether they are or not. Or you may say, “I need to go before the deacons or the elders and share something that I’m aware of that has the potential of hurting the people of God.” Of all the things that bring a response from me, it is when I sense

that something is in motion that can hurt the people of God. I am far more concerned about the people of God than about the individuals involved. Many times we say, "We don't want to offend them." You better warn the people about them or go to them and talk with them. I've done that many and many a time. The person may not be aware of how they are influencing others.

If you are a spiritual watchman it may be you sense that someone who has joined the youth group is beginning to pull many of the youth in a direction that is destructive and hurtful. You see it but the youth don't. That kind of a moment may come at a time when God is putting His hand on many of the youth and calling them into ministry and missions. What you see what has entered the youth group is going to turn them away from that and maybe because of that, most of those who might have felt the call of God into missions or the ministry will never feel that call. Does that have eternal significance? It does!

A spiritual watchman placed on the walls of the youth of his or her church may be the most important person that God has set up for the purpose of helping the youth. If you have noticed a sudden call of God to care about the youth, could I suggest that God may have been raising you up as a spiritual watchman on the walls of the youth of your church. God might be at the point where He wants to do His most significant move in the next generation, but there's an enemy who has come in. They are completely unaware of the impact, but you are not. Has God made you a spiritual watchman on the walls of your church?

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The Watchman Ezekiel

In Ezekiel 33 is another passage which specifically talks about God establishing a watchman and what he ought to do. You'll hear God say to Ezekiel: "O son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel" (v. 7). But God has something to say ahead of that. Beginning at verse one, we read: "Again..." Aren't you grateful that God doesn't stop after the first time, when you weren't paying attention, but that He comes again? Here is this wonderful word "again" the Lord came.

"Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: "When I [God] bring the sword upon a land and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, when he sees the sword coming again upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand. So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for me"' (vv. 1-7).

When I read a significant statement like that there comes over me under the Spirit's guidance the question, "Henry, has God made you a watchman unto His people? Has He made you a

watchman in the denomination of which you are a part?" And I sense that is true.

I got a call today from a man in Canada who said that some significant individual had called and wanted to partner with them and said he knew me. The one who called me asked, "What do you know?" At that point I knew a lot more than he knew, and I found myself functioning as a spiritual watchman on the walls of God's people in Canada. I had to give warning, because I knew some things and saw some things, and have heard some things that would create a great caution from my point of view. He said, "What would you do if you were me?" I said, "I will tell you...."

Being a spiritual watchman puts you in a position where you see and where you hear. That Scripture in Ezekiel says something like this: if I tell the watchman that a sword is coming, and then the watchman sees the sword coming, he must warn God's people, because it is life and death. If the people hear and believe they will be saved. If they do not, they will be destroyed. And the blood of the one who hears and chooses not to believe will be on his own head when he dies. But if the watchman fails to blow the trumpet and they are not warned, and the sword does come, they will die in their iniquity, but their blood will I require at the watchman's hand.

My prayer for all of us would be that when we make our way into the presence of Almighty God, we will be alert to the fact that He has made every one of us a measure of a watchman to those around us. It may be our marriage. Are there things coming against our marriage? Could God give one of you an unusual alertness and you see it coming? My wife is very sensitive at that point. These 46 years of our marriage she has on numerous occasions issued a warning of something that I was unaware of, but she saw the implications, and what could happen and warned me. I heeded the warning and I was spared. I thank Marilyn for her faithfulness to blow the trumpet to give

warning, and that I heeded the call.

A Watchman for Your Children

When I was guiding our children, I remember a moment in particular when I felt in some measure that I was a spiritual watchman. One of our children went through an experience in school and I sensed that I must give warning. My oldest son in the 11th grade had a French teacher, who before the whole class spoke with contempt about my son's ability to learn French and other languages.

That should never have happened. I knew what would go through Richard's mind. I saw him then enter university on a non-language degree. He took an honors degree because he didn't feel he would live up to his capabilities if he didn't go for that, but he remembered what the teacher had told him about his ability to learn languages. I realized there was a danger taking place because God might have such a dimension for his life that this could ruin God's plan for him. I knew that the enemy did not need to prevail. I began to share with him the significance of him not letting the counsel of a teacher ruin his chances.

It was while he was in university that he felt called to the seminary. He could take one of two directions: the language direction or the non-language direction. Because of the greater dimension to go in the language direction, I urged him to go that way. He said, "Dad, I can't do..." I replied, "Son, that is not true. You have a brain for languages if you just use it." So he took Greek and Hebrew. When he came to the last semester of his first degree, he felt called to go on to a PhD and in that last semester he passed a second year university level language degree in Greek, Hebrew, German and French. He went on to receive his PhD, and was called a few years later

to become president of our seminary in Canada. For the last thirteen years he has been guiding that school to great heights.

How significant it is for parents to be alert and to be spiritual watchmen on the walls of their children. Parents need to understand when something is happening in the life of their children that has a long-term effect, things that can be canceled if they had only been warned. Do not take lightly being a parent in the life of your children. They will be bombarded on every side, especially a Christian young person going into high school or university or college. You need to have spiritual eyes and ears as a watchman to detect when the enemy is coming against one of your children. You need to blow the trumpet and to sound the alarm and protect and stay with that child to keep that one headed in the direction of the perfect will of God for his or her life.

That can be true in many directions of your life. It certainly can be true for you in the life of your church and denomination. My prayer for you would be that you would never diminish the significance of the role that you have as a spiritual watchman by virtue of the fact that you are placed as a child of God in the midst of a people of God. You can hear something or see something or be aware of something that can affect the entire denomination.

Let me give you an illustration of how God alerted me. I still feel the pain of it. I was at one of our conference centers when one of our dear missionary couples and their children who were there asked to talk with me. They were on furlough and they were about to go back to East Africa. They said, "Henry, would you make a covenant to be an intercessor for us another term on a different level?"

A spiritual watchman is an intercessor. These are different roles but are often combined. There as we sat around the lunch table, I made as solemn a covenant as I could that I would

pray for them. Then I got busy and forgot to pray until I received word that Linda, on the road out of Zambia, was suddenly ambushed and killed. Immediately I remembered I had promised to be a watchman on the walls of their life and I had failed. You may say that I probably am not responsible. God told me I was responsible.

I had the privilege of making a trip to that country after that. I was with one of our dear missionaries who felt so close to Linda, and when we came along a certain road he said, "Let's stop right here." I asked, "Why are we stopping here?" He turned with tears streaming down his cheeks and said, "This is where Linda was killed." I said, "Let's linger a little longer, and I'll ask God to forgive me."

How serious is it to be a watchman on the walls of our missionary families? Don't leave them vulnerable. God will instruct you when to pray, and He will guide you what to pray, and He'll tell you when you need to write a letter or make a call, or in our generation we can gather a small group of people and say, "Let's go over and walk with them." If you've made a covenant with a missionary family to be a spiritual watchman on the walls of their mission or mission field, keep covenant with them because a watchman carries life and death in his or her hands.

God placed on my heart as a little boy an insatiable commitment to pray for the American Indian people. I've been on their reserves. I've walked with them and been in their homes. I have a huge heart to be a spiritual watchman on the walls of the native Indian people of the US and Canada. At a particular time God laid on my heart an unusual burden for the native people, and I didn't know why God was doing that afresh and anew. What was the enemy marshaling himself to do with the native people? I made a deep commitment afresh and anew. Before the week was out, a Native American Indian Christian leader came to me and said, "Henry, is there any possibility you could call for a meeting of the native Indian leadership

across America so that we could come together and you could talk to us about revival and spiritual awakening and prayer on our native Indian reserves? Could you call such a meeting?"

As a spiritual watchman I said, "I'll call it immediately." We've had that meeting in Oklahoma City. The leaders of the American Indian people came from all over the nation and some from Canada. Every time I spoke and gave an invitation the whole front was filled with native Indian leaders weeping and sobbing before the Lord, and bringing their lives into harmony with the will of God. Do you think that was a moment of God's choosing to build strength for what they may be facing in the days to come? I've been watching carefully what's been happening to those dear people. God has led me to be a spiritual watchman. Before that week was out someone had come from Canada and he said, "Henry, would you be willing to meet with the leadership of the First Nations from all across Canada and into the Northwest Territories and up to the Arctic Circle? We could come. Would you speak for two days to us about revival and awakening from God's heart to our reserves?" That will probably take place this next spring.

What About Your Role?

When you go to pray, God may lift you up to a level that you've never been before, and He will say to you, "I've set you as a watchman," and He will tell you what the parameters are of your assignment. Are you watching over your grandchildren? Are you watching over your church family? Are you watching over your city or the group of churches that make up your denomination in the city? Where has God placed you in your prayer life? This conference theme is "Praying for a Change." I believe one of those moments when God initiates a change is when He calls you and me to be a watchman on the walls of His people somewhere. Do not take that lightly.

The enemy will come, but God is wanting someone to blow the trumpet. Have you said, "I'm too old," or "Nobody will listen to me"? They may not listen to you, but they may listen to the trumpet sound. When you blow the warning, then they may listen. My prayer is that you will never again be a watchman on the walls of God's family and see the enemy come and fail to blow the trumpet or sound the alarm. You must sound the alarm or they will never know that they ought to take warning or that there is an enemy. God may give you an insight that they do not have. The Bible simply says that God places watchmen on the walls of His people. Would you let God assign you? Would you open your heart to God to be a spiritual watchman to hear and see what others may not, and will you say to God, "Whatever You show me that is putting Your people in any danger, Lord, give me the spiritual boldness and courage to put the trumpet to my lips and blow the warning so that nobody will be where the enemy is destroying and not realize what is going on and that we need to pay attention."

My dad was a deacon all my life. He was a businessman and a very committed Christian. He probably influenced me as much as anyone. In the front of my Bible I have a picture of my dad in his typical hat and suit holding my hand as a little 11-year-old boy, walking down the street. That is a symbol to me of how God gave me a precious father who held my hand through the growing times and put in my heart what God would be saying to me. He was a spiritual watchman for my life and he warned me and shared with me. Part of what I am today is because he was faithful to warn.

Again and again I make my way to an altar. God raises new things in my life and He wants to meet me for these things as well. I pray, "God, You've laid on my heart some things I've not thought about but I have now, and I want You to know that here's my life. Do with me whatever You choose and, Lord, I'm willing to let You do it in the midst of Your people because You are deeply concerned about every level of what's happening

to my people and every aspect of their life. If you call me to be a watchman for the children or the youth or the college students or the senior adults in my church or my city or even to a larger fellowship of Your people, Lord, I want You to know I will be that watchman and I will blow that trumpet as You enable me in this Your assignment to my life." The life and destiny of God's people may well rest in your faithfulness to be a spiritual watchman, especially when you pray. Let's pray together and personally respond to God.

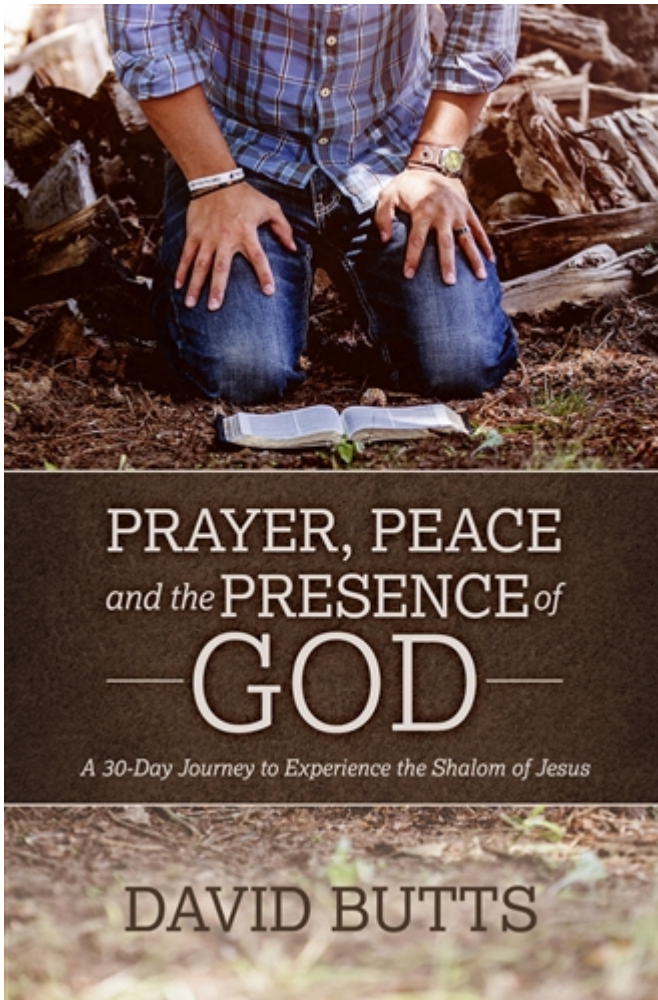
Prayer

"Father, we hear You say, 'I have made you a watchman unto your people.' Father, help us to identify Your activity in our life. Help us to feel the weight of giving a warning when the enemy seems to be so active. When Your people are under the strain and the stress, they need to know what it is that has come against them. Lord, You may have given us unusual insight or You are about to because You are about to set us on the walls of our family afresh or our church or our city and You are stirring in our heart. Father, help us to know it is You and to remember that You have done that in other days, and that You will not let this generation go by without many watchmen. You will not let this generation go without warnings so that we can adjust our lives.

"Father, even now You are putting Your hand on many who will make a decision about their life as spiritual watchmen on the walls of Your people or their homes. May You do a great work in our heart, and don't let us ever be afraid to blow the trumpet. So Father, along with the others, I wait for and watch for and expect Your anointing on my life to fulfill such an assignment.

"And You have made me aware of what could happen if they never

hear the warning. Enable us in these moments of worship to respond to Your invitation which is so critical for the lives of Your people and our families in the days and months that lie before us. We ask it in the Name of Jesus our Lord.”



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