SUNDAY · DAY 1

The Watchman on the Wall

Stay Awake!

“Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.” — Ezekiel 3:17 (KJV)

Have you ever stayed awake all night? Perhaps you have worked a night shift, traveled a long distance, or stayed up caring for someone who needed your attention.

When you are responsible for something important, you cannot afford to fall asleep. In ancient cities, watchmen were stationed on walls or towers, usually at the highest points where they could see the greatest distance. Their responsibility was to remain alert, observe approaching dangers, and warn the inhabitants of the city.

The watchman's job was not necessarily to fight the approaching enemy. His responsibility was to see danger coming and sound the alarm. Everyone in the city depended upon him.

God used this same picture when He called Ezekiel to be a watchman for the house of Israel. Ezekiel was given the responsibility of warning the people about the consequences of their unrighteousness.

Notice that God did not tell Ezekiel to make everyone happy or to become popular. He told him to faithfully deliver the warning. This responsibility continues in the New Testament.

Jesus repeatedly commanded His followers to watch. In Matthew 24:42, He said, “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.”

We are to remain spiritually awake, attentive to the signs of the times, and prepared for the return of Christ.

But watching involves more than simply observing world events or identifying prophetic signs. It requires spiritual alertness in our own lives.

We must recognize the dangers that threaten our faith, our families, and our fellow believers. A watchman who falls asleep is of little use to the city. Likewise, Christians who become spiritually complacent cannot effectively warn others.

We have a responsibility to remain awake, stand firm in the faith, and faithfully warn those around us.

The question is: Are we watching?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help me remain spiritually awake. Give me the discernment to recognize the dangers that threaten my faith and the courage to warn others when necessary. Keep me from becoming complacent or distracted by the things of this world. Help me faithfully fulfill the responsibilities You have given me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

FURTHER STUDY · ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- Ezekiel 3:16–21 — Ezekiel's responsibility as a watchman.
- Ezekiel 33:1–9 — The watchman and the warning.
- Matthew 24:36–44 — Watching for the coming of the Son of man.
- Luke 12:35–40 — Servants waiting for their master.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:1–8 — Remaining spiritually awake.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to be spiritually awake in a world that encourages spiritual complacency?
2. Why do you think God compares the responsibility of warning others to the work of a watchman?
3. What are some dangers that Christians today should be watching for and warning others about?

MONDAY · DAY 2

Stand Fast in the Faith

More Than Just Knowing the Bible

"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." — 1 Corinthians 16:13 (KJV)

Being a watchman requires more than simply staying awake. It requires knowing what you are watching for.

A watchman must be able to recognize danger. He must distinguish between friend and foe, between something harmless and something that threatens the safety of the city.

The same is true spiritually. Peter gives us this warning:

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8).

The enemy is not always obvious. Sometimes danger comes in the form of something that appears harmless, attractive, or even religious.

This is why spiritual discernment is so important. In the Old Testament, there are interesting examples of watchmen identifying individuals by the way they ran or rode.

In 2 Samuel 18:24–27, the watchman recognizes the running of Ahimaaz. In 2 Kings 9:17–20, the watchman identifies Jehu by the way he drives his chariot.

The watchmen had developed the ability to recognize what was approaching. Spiritually, we need that same kind of discernment.

But notice what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16:13. He doesn't simply say to watch. He says to stand fast in the faith, be strong, and conduct yourselves with courage.

Being strong in the faith is much more than having an intellectual knowledge of biblical teachings. The devil knows Scripture. He can quote it, twist it, and use it deceptively. Knowledge alone does not make someone spiritually mature.

True spiritual strength is demonstrated by a life that reflects Jesus Christ. Hebrews 12:2 describes Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith. He is our example of what faithfulness looks like.

A faithful watchman must first be a faithful follower of Christ.

We cannot effectively warn others about spiritual dangers while neglecting our own spiritual condition. Before we point out the dangers approaching the city, we must make sure we are standing firmly upon the foundation of truth ourselves.

PRAYER

Father, strengthen my faith and help me develop genuine spiritual discernment. Teach me to recognize deception without becoming suspicious of everyone around me. Help me grow in the character of Christ, not merely in my knowledge of religious subjects. May my life demonstrate the faith I profess. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY · ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- 1 Corinthians 16:13–14 — Standing firm and doing everything in love.
- 1 Peter 5:6–11 — Being sober and vigilant.
- Hebrews 12:1–3 — Looking unto Jesus.
- Ephesians 6:10–18 — Putting on the whole armour of God.
- Philippians 1:9–11 — Growing in knowledge and discernment.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between knowing biblical information and demonstrating genuine spiritual strength?
2. How can we distinguish between healthy spiritual discernment and becoming overly suspicious or critical of others?
3. What qualities of Jesus should be evident in someone who considers himself or herself a spiritual watchman?

TUESDAY · DAY 3

Watchmen or Gatekeepers?

Guarding What Doesn't Belong to Us

“But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.” — Matthew 23:13 (KJV)

There is an important distinction between a watchman and a gatekeeper. A watchman warns people of approaching danger because he cares about their safety.

A spiritual gatekeeper, however, attempts to control access to something that does not belong to him.

Gatekeeping is the act of controlling access to something others need, often by people who do not own it.

Gatekeepers guard a gate they didn't build, over a kingdom they don't own.

One of the clearest biblical examples is the religious leadership of Jesus' day. The Pharisees had become so preoccupied with maintaining their religious authority that they were actually preventing people from entering the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus condemned them because they were shutting the door on others while failing to enter themselves.

Luke 11:52 gives another description of this behavior. Jesus said the lawyers had taken away the key of knowledge. They had not entered themselves, and they hindered those who wanted to enter.

Think about that.

These men were supposed to be teachers of God's truth. They were supposed to help people understand Scripture and draw closer to God.

Instead, they became obstacles. This is a sobering warning for anyone who assumes a position of spiritual influence.

It is possible to begin with a sincere desire to protect biblical truth but gradually become more concerned with protecting our own religious systems, traditions, and authority.

We must never confuse protecting people from deception with controlling people for our own purposes.

A faithful watchman points people toward the truth. A gatekeeper can become someone who stands between people and the truth.

Our responsibility is to help people come to Christ, not make ourselves the authority through which everyone must pass.

PRAYER

Lord, protect me from developing a controlling spirit. Help me recognize the difference between faithfully defending Your truth and protecting my own opinions, traditions, or authority. Never allow me to become an obstacle to someone who is sincerely seeking You. Give me the humility to point others toward Christ rather than toward myself. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY · ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- Matthew 23:1–13 — Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of religious leadership.
- Luke 11:37–54 — The lawyers and the key of knowledge.
- Matthew 15:1–9 — When human traditions replace God's commandments.
- Galatians 5:1–6 — Standing in the liberty of Christ.
- 2 Corinthians 1:24 — Not exercising dominion over the faith of others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between protecting biblical truth and attempting to control other people's access to it?
2. How can religious traditions and systems become obstacles to people who are sincerely seeking God?
3. Have you ever encountered a situation where someone seemed more interested in protecting an institution than helping someone understand the truth?

WEDNESDAY · DAY 4

When Religious Membership Becomes a Weapon

The Man Born Blind

“He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.” — John 9:25 (KJV)

One of the most fascinating examples of religious gatekeeping is found in John 9. Jesus healed a man who had been blind from birth. Instead of rejoicing over this incredible miracle, the religious leaders became increasingly hostile.

They interrogated the man, questioned his parents, and demanded an explanation. His parents were afraid to answer because they knew that anyone who confessed Jesus as the Christ could be put out of the synagogue.

This is an important detail. Religious membership had become a form of leverage. The leaders could use the threat of exclusion to pressure people into accepting their particular religious position.

The issue was no longer simply whether something was true. It was whether someone was willing to submit to the authority of those controlling the institution.

But the healed man refused to deny what had happened to him. He didn't have an elaborate theological argument. He simply testified to what he knew.

“One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.”

Eventually, the religious leaders cast him out.

Think about the irony. The man who had received his sight was rejected by those who claimed to have spiritual understanding.

They were so committed to protecting their religious authority that they could not rejoice in the work of God happening right in front of them.

This should cause us to examine our own attitudes.

Do we ever use church membership, religious affiliation, or institutional acceptance to pressure people into conformity?

Are we more concerned about whether someone belongs to our group than whether they are sincerely seeking and following Christ?

There is a difference between maintaining biblical standards and using religious membership as a weapon.

The church should be a place where people are pointed toward Christ, not a place where people are intimidated into silence.

The healed man's testimony reminds us that truth does not become false simply because religious authorities reject it.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, give me the courage to stand for truth even when it is unpopular. Help me never use religious affiliation, membership, or acceptance as a means of controlling others. Give me compassion for those who are sincerely seeking You, and help me rejoice whenever someone receives spiritual sight. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY · ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- John 9:1–12 — Jesus heals the man born blind.
- John 9:13–34 — The religious leaders interrogate the healed man.
- John 9:35–41 — Jesus receives the man whom others rejected.
- Galatians 2:11–16 — Peter and the pressure of religious conformity.
- Romans 14:1–13 — Receiving one another without judging one another.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why were the religious leaders more concerned with the man's testimony than with celebrating his healing?
2. How can the threat of losing religious membership or acceptance influence someone's willingness to speak the truth?
3. How can churches maintain biblical convictions without using membership or affiliation as a tool of manipulation?

THURSDAY · DAY 5

Who Has the Right to Minister?

The Danger of Religious Exclusivity

"But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part." — Mark 9:39–40 (KJV)

Sometimes gatekeeping happens when people attempt to control who is allowed to serve God.

In Mark 9, the disciples encountered someone casting out devils in the name of Jesus. But there was a problem: He wasn't following them.

Their response was to forbid him. Notice their reasoning. They weren't necessarily concerned that the man was doing something wrong. They were concerned that he wasn't part of their circle.

Jesus corrected them.

"Forbid him not."

The disciples had confused their relationship with Jesus with ownership of His ministry. They seemed to believe that because they were His recognized disciples, they had the right to determine who else could work in His name.

This is a temptation that can still exist today.

Churches and religious organizations can become so concerned with protecting their own systems, methods, and identities that they begin to treat their particular organization as though it were the exclusive representative of God's kingdom.

This does not mean that doctrine and accountability are unimportant. Scripture repeatedly warns against false teachers and deceptive practices.

But we must be careful not to confuse loyalty to an organization with loyalty to Christ. Jesus is the head of the church. The ministry belongs to Him.

We are called to test teachings, examine fruit, and remain faithful to Scripture. But we should not assume that everyone outside our particular circle is automatically working against God.

The disciples needed to learn that God's work was bigger than their own group. We need that same humility today.

PRAYER

Father, help me never confuse loyalty to a religious organization with loyalty to You. Give me discernment to recognize false teachings while also giving me humility to recognize Your work beyond the boundaries of my own circle. Help me rejoice when others are faithfully serving You. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY · ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

• Mark 9:33–41 — The disciples learn not to forbid another worker.

• 1 Corinthians 1:10–13 — The danger of divisions and party spirit.

• 1 Corinthians 3:4–9 — Ministers are servants, but God gives the increase.

• Romans 12:3–8 — Different gifts within one body.

• Ephesians 4:1–7 — Unity and diversity within the body of Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why were the disciples troubled by someone doing ministry outside their immediate group?

2. How can we distinguish between legitimate accountability in ministry and unhealthy religious exclusivity?

3. What are some ways churches can unintentionally communicate that their organization, rather than Christ, is the center of God's work?

FRIDAY · DAY 6

The Spirit of the Sons of Thunder

Warning Others Without Wanting to Destroy Them

“But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.” — Luke 9:55–56 (KJV)

Jesus gave James and John an interesting nickname: Boanerges, which means sons of thunder (Mark 3:17).

We find out why in Luke 9. Jesus and His disciples were traveling toward Jerusalem, and they encountered a Samaritan village that would not receive Him. James and John were furious.

They asked Jesus:

“Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?”

They wanted judgment.

They wanted to call down fire from heaven and destroy the people who had rejected Jesus.

But Jesus rebuked them.

“Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.”

This is a powerful lesson for anyone who believes they have been called to warn others. It is possible to recognize a genuine spiritual danger and still respond with the wrong spirit.

We can be correct about the problem but completely wrong in our attitude toward the people involved.

A watchman must warn others. But he must never develop a desire to see people destroyed. The spirit of Christ is different. Jesus said He came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

That doesn't mean Jesus never rebuked sin or warned of judgment. He certainly did both. But His purpose was not personal revenge or self-exaltation.

His purpose was salvation.

This is where we must examine ourselves. When we warn someone, are we genuinely concerned about their spiritual condition? Or are we simply frustrated that they disagree with us?

Do we want them to repent and find life, or do we secretly enjoy exposing their failures?

The spirit of the sons of thunder can still manifest itself in religious circles today. It can appear as relentless criticism, condemnation, and a desire to call down judgment upon anyone who does not agree with us.

But a faithful watchman must possess the spirit of Christ. We must be courageous enough to warn, humble enough to correct, and loving enough to desire the salvation of those who are in danger.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, give me Your spirit. Help me speak the truth boldly without becoming harsh, proud, or vindictive. When I see others in danger, let my first desire be their restoration rather than their destruction. Remove from me the spirit of criticism and self-righteousness. Help me reflect Your mercy, patience, and love while remaining faithful to Your truth. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY · ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- Mark 3:13–19 — Jesus calls James and John, the sons of thunder.
- Luke 9:51–56 — The Samaritan village and the sons of thunder.
- Matthew 5:43–48 — Loving our enemies.
- Galatians 6:1–2 — Restoring others in a spirit of meekness.
- 2 Timothy 2:24–26 — The Lord's servant must be gentle and patient.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between being zealous for God's truth and developing a spirit of religious hostility?
2. Have you ever seen someone use biblical warnings as an excuse to criticize, condemn, or mistreat others?
3. How can we maintain strong convictions while still demonstrating the patience and mercy of Christ?

SATURDAY · DAY 7

The Spirit of Christ

Watchmen With the Heart of a Savior

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:” — Philippians 2:5 (KJV)

Throughout this week, we have examined the responsibility of being watchmen and the dangers of becoming gatekeepers. We have seen that watchmen are called to remain alert, recognize danger, and faithfully warn others.

But we have also seen how religious leaders can misuse their influence.

The Pharisees shut the kingdom of heaven against people. Religious authorities used membership as leverage. The disciples attempted to control who could minister. James and John wanted to destroy those who rejected Jesus.

These examples reveal an important truth: It is possible to claim to be defending God's kingdom while actually working against it.

This problem has appeared all throughout church history.

During the medieval period, religious authorities restricted ordinary people's access to Scripture in their own language. The Council of Toulouse in 1229, for example, restricted lay possession of vernacular biblical translations in its jurisdiction.

John Wycliffe's English Bible and the work of William Tyndale became important parts of the struggle to make Scripture accessible to ordinary people. Tyndale was eventually executed in 1536 for his work translating the Bible into English.

The printing press helped break down barriers that had kept Scripture out of the hands of many ordinary people.

The church was supposed to be a watchman, helping people recognize spiritual danger and understand God's Word. Yet religious authorities became a gatekeeper, controlling access to truth.

We should ask ourselves whether we are ever guilty of similar attitudes today.

Do we exclude people because they do not fit our expectations?

Do we make acceptance conditional upon conformity to our preferences?

Do we withhold encouragement, ministry opportunities, or fellowship from those we consider unworthy?

We must be careful. This is not a call to abandon biblical standards or accept every teaching. We are still called to test the spirits, examine doctrine, and warn against deception.

But the spirit in which we do these things matters.

Paul gives us the ultimate example in Philippians 2:5–8. He describes the humility of Jesus, who made Himself of no reputation, took upon Himself the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death.

Jesus did not come to establish His own earthly status or control people for personal gain.

He came to give His life.

And that is the spirit we need.

A faithful watchman does not seek power over the people he is watching. He seeks their safety. He does not want to close the gates to those seeking God. He wants to help them find the way.

Jesus came to save men's lives, not destroy them.

May we never become so focused on identifying the dangers around us that we forget the heart of the One we claim to represent.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, let the mind of Christ be in me. Help me become a faithful watchman who is courageous enough to warn others, humble enough to recognize my own weaknesses, and loving enough to desire the salvation of those who are in danger. Keep me from becoming controlling, self-righteous, or exclusive. May my life open doors for others to come to know Jesus rather than becoming an obstacle in their way. In His precious name, Amen.

FURTHER STUDY · ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- Philippians 2:1–11 — The humility and mind of Christ.
- Luke 9:51–56 — Jesus' purpose in coming to save.
- John 10:1–16 — Jesus as the Good Shepherd.
- 2 Corinthians 4:1–7 — Proclaiming Christ rather than ourselves.
- 2 Timothy 2:24–26 — Correcting opponents with gentleness.
- Revelation 3:20 — Christ standing at the door and knocking.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the humility of Jesus in Philippians 2 challenge the way we sometimes exercise religious authority?
2. What are some practical ways we can be watchmen who warn others without becoming gatekeepers who control them?
3. If someone examined our attitudes, conversations, and treatment of others, would they see more of the spirit of Christ or the spirit of the sons of thunder?