

Have you ever had a hard time going to sleep at night? Maybe something's bothering you during the day; the struggles seem to weave themselves into the strangest of dreams. Eight-year-old girl Joanne had that problem—scary dreams dancing in her head at night. She decided to write a letter to God, which appeared in a newspaper along with a collection of other letters to God: "Dear God: I'm afraid of things at night more than in the day. So if you could keep the sun on longer that would a good thing."¹

Have you ever wished God could keep the sun on longer? I remember when my children were young they would often be afraid of the dark, so I would buy nightlights to put in their room—colorful characters such as a princess for my daughter or a superhero for my son. Somehow having a small amount of light in the room kept away the shadows of fear, and even now I have a few nightlights around the house, making it easier to get up in the middle of the night and navigate to the bathroom without running into anything.

There's something about a small sliver of light that offers guidance in the night, and during the past several weeks we've explored stories of light from the opening books of the Bible that offer a sliver of hope:

- In the beginning God created light from darkness (**GLOBE**)
- Abraham struggled by the light of the fire when deciding on his sacrifice and discovered that God provides (**FIRE**)
- Isaac's eyes were dim, and he could not see when trying to bless his eldest son. The younger Jacob tricked his brother out of his blessing but then dreamed of a ladder reaching to heaven as a reminder that God was still with him (**LADDER**)
- Moses questioned in the light of the burning bush how he could lead the people to freedom, but God promised to be with him (**SANDALS**)
- Even though the people found freedom and stood in God's light, they complained that they didn't have enough, but God provided manna to eat (**BREAD**).

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As in the story of Isaac, once again we encounter a story when someone's eyes were dim and could not see very well—this time, the priest Eli, who had recruited the young boy Samuel to assist him in the temple. The narrator portrays Eli as a bumbling man, seemingly confused about what God was doing. We first meet Eli as he wrongly accuses Samuel's mother Hannah of being drunk when he saw her praying and crying in the temple. She was passionately crying out to God to give her a child, but Eli thought she'd had too much to drink.

When Hannah's son is born, she dedicates him to God, and this child Samuel assists Eli in the temple as a young boy. We're told that visions were not widespread and Eli's eyesight had begun to grow dim, but the narrator gives us a spark of hope, a nightlight: "the lamp of God had not yet gone out."

Even when Eli could not see what God was doing, a smaller sliver of light appears, for in the shadows in the middle of the night a nightlight seems to appear out of nowhere as God calls to

Samuel. Being somewhat confused at this voice in the night, the boy goes to Eli, thinking he had called him. Eli groggily replies, "It's not me. Go back to sleep." This happens again another time, but the bewildered Eli doesn't get what's going on. When God calls to Samuel a third time, Eli finally perceives what's happening and suggests: "Next time you hear the voice, reply 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"

Samuel heard the call a fourth time, and this time he replied, "I'm listening, God." God told the young boy some disturbing news about what would happen, for Eli's ability to lead was disintegrating. Changes would soon occur. The next morning Samuel hesitated to tell Eli the troubling news.

It's sometimes hard to bring a light of hope in the midst of difficult situations. Often we long for a nightlight, hoping it helps us find our way in the shadows. Today many women find themselves walking in shadows through human trafficking, a system that buys and sells children and women, forcing them into modern-day slavery. In Branson

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Missouri, among the musical shows and entertainment, a network of trafficking hides in the shadows. An organization known as NightLight also roams the streets at night, searching for women who might need a glimmer of hope. In reflecting about one encounter with a woman, NightLight team member Shauna wrote:

“Angela” was extremely nervous we met with her for the first time... she was still frightened to share her story, unsure of how we would react, and only cautiously optimistic that we could help.

Over the next two hours, after a little light conversation and warming up, Angela unpacked bits and pieces of her story for us. We did a lot of listening, and we asked a few questions. We asked her to share her needs with us, and we told her what our next steps would be in figuring out how to help.

This is a snippet from the email received from Angela the following day: “I thank you greatly for your visit this morning. It is a comfort

to know that you have heard my story before and [were] not surprised or shocked or met with disbelief. Thank you.”

A little later, she shared, “You have no idea what a life changing opportunity you offer to others who really believe they have no other choice. I'm still afraid what will happen to me... When I arrived here, I didn't feel worthy of a good life.”

Angela has conveyed...how she had lost hope in her life and her future before [our team] met her. Now, she is starting to dream a little bit. She is starting to believe that what happened to her doesn't have to define the rest of her life.²

Angela found a spark of hope hidden in the shadows through NightLight, just as Samuel saw a glimmer in the middle of the night as God called out to him. And even though Samuel hesitated to speak to Eli the next morning about what God had said, Samuel confronted Eli with the news that God was unhappy with the way things were going.

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Change needed to happen, and that's not an easy message to deliver.

Have you ever found yourself in that situation? You know something needs to change, but you're hesitant to speak out. You wonder what others might think if you speak an unpopular word. There are those times when it's too important to not speak out, as in the case of those experiencing domestic violence.

This weekend has been designated "Speak Out Sabbath," reminding us that "in 2013, the World Health Organization officially classified violence against women as a 'significant public health problem,' reporting that a startling 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence." In addition, another study indicated that "one in four

U.S. men will be the victim of intimate partner violence."³

The statistics feel overwhelming, for they indicate that more than likely each one of us knows someone facing violence, and that's something we need to speak out against. Just as Samuel may have felt inadequate to bring harsh words from God against Eli, we may feel just as ambivalent asking someone about possible violence and helping them find safety. Eli encouraged Samuel to be honest about what God had called him to do, and the young Samuel spoke up and told Eli about the changes that were coming. In the same way, if you or I see someone who needs protection, God will give us the wisdom to speak out to help change lives and shine a nightlight of hope to those caught in the shadows of fear.

¹ Adapted from Hodgin, Michael. *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 2480-2481). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

² <http://us9.campaign-archive1.com/?u=db25ec77aee9676d8a7cd3424&id=0c09cf7723>

³ <https://wewillsspeakout.us/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Sacred-Spaces-.pdf>