

Meditating in the “Night Watches”

Last week, I talked about the importance of feeding our souls even when we feel like we’re too tired to eat, and today I want to share some practical ideas for how busy/sleepy mommies can find time when no time is to be found.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. (Psalm 19:7-11)

The Bible, On Reading the Bible

One of my favorite motifs in the psalms is this idea of meditating on God “in the night watches.” David was on the run for so much of his life as a military man, and he mentions repeatedly how much he enjoys finding time to spend with God in the night. Psalm 63:6, Psalm 4:4, Psalm 16:7, and the non-Davidic Psalm 119:55 and Psalm 119:148 all talk about meditating on God’s word at night, on their beds or during their watches. Mommies of infants have many “night watches,” and I have found it a very useful, quiet, contemplative time to dive into Scripture. My mind might not be as fresh as it is in the morning, but the general stillness compared to the day is a great value. The Proverbs 31 woman thought nighttime was a redeemable time as well; in verse 18 we see that “her lamp does not go out at night.” (And we also see that she rises early—this is a woman who burns the candle at both ends!) So, despite the strong cultural push to read Scripture first thing in the morning—I have read some authors who say resolutely that the only way to be a well-fed mother is to get up at 5am and have that time marked out before the children get up—Scripture is not so rigid. Reading “in the night watches” is valid, too.

There is another Scriptural precedent that is worth looking at, though: in Daniel 6:10, we see that Daniel had a *plan*. He had a custom, a habit, of marking out

regular time. It wasn't haphazard and he didn't try to work it into his day at the last minute. Again, one can be far too rigorous about this, but, for me personally, I have learned that I am a person who definitely needs to make a plan. If I am just expecting to spend time in Scripture and prayer "sometime," then it isn't going to happen. Don't underestimate the value of thinking ahead and doing things in a regular order.

Lastly, while Scripture talks about clear times when people sat down and actually read the word, there is another word that comes up frequently: *meditate*. Joshua 1:8 commands the Israelites to "meditate" on the Book of the Law "day and night." Psalm 1:2 says that the righteous man "meditates day and night" on God's law. Isaiah 26:3 says "you keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you." We cannot just read our chapter a day, mark it off our list, and go on with our own pursuits and thoughts for the other twenty-three hours of the day. Rather, God's word should *permeate* us and be continually before our eyes and hearts (Proverbs 4:21). Keep thinking and praying, even when the book is closed.

When to Read

Wake up early - If you are busy dawn to dusk and can't imagine finding time in the middle of your day, then, by all means, follow the suggestion to simply *move your alarm earlier*. It is worth the fifteen minutes of lost sleep if you get up and spend that time with God. This is a solution that works for everyone.

With your coffee - Most of us have morning routines of some variety or another. Mine involves coffee! Many of us reach for our phones or computers to check our email or Facebook. Whatever you do in the morning, put off the Facebooking, and get some time in the Word first.

At lunchtime or naptime - If you have a child who still naps, this is an easy time to set apart. I have taken my tablet in with me as I sit with a child who struggles to nap, I have read in a nearby room while my children eat lunch, and I very often sit and read while my younger kids nap. I just prioritize it above the other things I might want to do at naptime, like laundry or homeschool.

In the car - Perhaps you have a car drop-off line to take your kids to school, or maybe you drive somewhere regularly and can listen to Scripture as you drive. Most of us spend a lot of time on the road. Use it.

While you're waiting for dinner to cook - If you're a fan of the Instant Pot, then once you push that magical "start" button, you've got at least twenty minutes before you have to be ready to plate it. Use that 20 minutes. If you're making scrambled eggs for dinner, bring your Bible and prop it up on the counter and read it while you stir. Even better, listen to an audio Bible and keep your hands and eyes free for the food.

After dinner - At our house, everything kind of calms down after dinner. Daddy is home, the children are tired and settling down in advance of bed, and the baby is asleep early. Great time to sneak off somewhere and read.

After bedtime - Just like anyone can set their alarm to get up fifteen minutes earlier, anyone can stay up fifteen minutes later. Again, it's useful to grab a tablet and sit down with Scripture while urging a toddler to sleep, or waiting and working with a preschooler to stay in their beds... or failing that, before you lie down for your own night's rest, take those minutes to spend with God first. I am most often an after-bedtimer, because our kids go to bed early and I find I am less distracted than at any other time in the day, and I'm a "night owl," meaning my brain is wired to be most attentive at night, even on my most tired day. I read earlier in the day if a good opportunity came up, but my "dedicated" time is before I go to bed.

The bottom line of every single scheduling idea is *it is worth it*. It's worth it to get up early, stay up late, get behind on the laundry, miss a bit of socializing, whatever. The time is there, we just have to make the decision to take it.

Planning to Read

One thing I have realized recently (as I read through the Bible, ironically! :) is that people *in* the Bible read *chunks* of the Bible. In 2 Kings 22, Hilkiah the priest finds and they read the entire Book of the Law to King Josiah. Ezra does the same in Nehemiah 8. In Daniel 9:2, we learn that Daniel has been methodically studying Jeremiah. The Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 has been reading through Isaiah. None of these people were just reading a verse here and there; they were reading whole vast sections, and God blessed their efforts. There is a lot more to Scripture than just little soundbytes that make it on Instagram quotes or get printed onto bookmarks. Context can hugely change the meaning and depth of those verses, even widely quoted ones like John 3:16. Don't just read the Bible in

little tiny pieces.

But at the same time, reading a whole book like Isaiah can take a really, really long time. Time that many of us really don't have in our day, at least not without arranging babysitting in advance. Here, too, I don't want to be legalistic and say the right amount is XYZ. I have learned that the "right amount" hinges on many different factors. To me, if I am reading such short segments that it is hard to get the gist of the passage, I'm not reading enough. If I am trying to read such long segments that I fail to do it at all, then I'm trying to read too much. There are different seasons and different situations.

Similarly, there is a time to read the Bible through cover-to-cover, and there is a time to stop and realize, hey, I need to read Job right now. Or I need to read the Psalms. I need to read the Gospels. Romans. The New Testament. Be purposeful. Don't be one of those people who never reads Haggai—Haggai has some convicting illustrations about how sin taints every thing we do. All the books are God's word and all of them are useful and helpful to us. But, again, Scripture doesn't tell us to read it according to the table of contents! Pray and seek the Spirit's leading about even which book to read. There are some [great reading plans](#) out there (one featured in that post, a bunch more linked at the bottom).

Other Moments to Seize

Beyond the simple time we spend reading God's word, there are many other ways in our days that we can purposefully turn our focus on Him.

Put Scripture in our houses. I mean this literally: write it on notecards and stick it above your sink. Put it over your washer. Get mugs and decor with Scripture. Keep it before your eyes.

Listen to Scripture-saturated music. Worship music, in general, is very helpful for keeping us centered, but I love Scripture-based music even more! Seeds Family Worship, Songs for Saplings, Jamie Soles, Scripture Lullabies, Steve Green's Hide 'Em in Your Heart, Rain for Roots, Shane & Shane... all good names to look up to start with, and I'm sure there are many more.

Read Scripture with your children. Whether it's family worship, "Bible" class in homeschooling, or [mother-and-child Bible studies](#), it's amazing how much of an

impact “simple” presentations of Scripture can have on *me* when I’m presenting it to my children and trying to answer their questions.

Listen to it in the car. All those minutes of driving can be turned to worship! Audio Bibles, Scripture music, worship music, sermons—redeem the time!

The word of the Lord is *bread*. It is more to be desired than fine gold. It is life-transforming, sustaining, encouraging, sanctifying, useful, practical, supernatural, and completely effective. Just like we make healthy meals for our children, it is essential that we be attentive and make sure we are getting fed spiritually as well.