



Comfort in the Darkness



HELPING CHILDREN DRAW CLOSE TO GOD
THROUGH BIBLICAL STORIES OF NIGHT-TIME AND SLEEP

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Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	7
1. THE FIRST NIGHT	11
2. GOD'S NIGHT LIGHT	15
3. NIGHTLY SPECIAL DELIVERY	21
4. A VOICE IN THE NIGHT	29
5. SONGS IN THE NIGHT	37
6. AWAKE ALL NIGHT.....	43
7. NO ORDINARY NIGHT	51
8. OVERNIGHT CHAT	59
9. RESCUE IN THE DARK.....	67
10. HIDDEN IN THE NIGHT.....	75
11. SLEEPING IN THE STORM.....	83
12. MORE REAL THAN REAL	91
13. GIFTS IN THE NIGHT	97
14. A CLUE TO THE FUTURE.....	105
15. A CHANGE OF HEART	113
16. A NEW KIND OF CALL.....	121
FAQ.....	129



Introduction



Night-time. When you say the word ‘night-time’ to most of us parents or carers, a flood of clashing thoughts pours over us: the joy of cuddles; the stress of wrangling children through the bath and food routine; the endless requests for ‘one more’ drink, hug, story and question; and the precious conversations dealing with bad dreams, random fears and interrupted sleep. Parenting children in the night isn’t easy.

Night-time is such a vulnerable time for our children. It’s a time when the worries of the day, deep fears, thoughtful wonderings, and tomorrow’s stresses all bubble to the surface. We long for our children to find the deep peace, safety and rest that come from God in the night. We want our children to experience the night-time as a wonderful place of closeness to and connection with us and with God—a place where our children can process their days and rest in contentment.

So often, though, our children struggle in the night. They can be afraid of the dark, uncomfortable with being alone or terrified by nightmares, or they may find it difficult to settle their minds and hearts. So we give them night lights and read them Bible stories and insist that there are no monsters in the closet or ghosts in the hallway. For a while, our plasters may work, but they don’t change our children’s fears. The night often remains a source of uncertainty, to be managed some times better than others.

Our children need to learn how to think differently about the night. They need to explore who God is in the night and what he does while they sleep and dream. They need to learn to see the night-time as being filled with the good things of God. This book aims to help you take your children on this journey of exploration.

Night-time can be one of the most frustrating times for us as parents, but it can also be one of the most powerful times of parenting as well. It is a time of intimacy, of reflection, of peace and thought. It can be a time of building connections and spiritual foundations. It can be a joy. It’s a time for our children to think about God and become rooted in

the truth of him in the night—a truth that goes beyond their immediate need and straight to their hearts.

This isn't a book to tell you how to do your night-time routine better. It's not a book to help you make your children into perfect children who never ask for water and always stay in bed. This is a book to help you shape the time at night with your children in a way that connects you to each other and to God, even in the midst of your family's quirks and the way they are. It will help you build for your children a foundational understanding of God, so that when they lie down to sleep, they will know who God is in the dark and quietness, and what he does while they are asleep.

There are 16 stories in this book to read to your children. Each story can stand on its own. If you only want to read the stories to your children, then the book will serve your needs. Each story covers a different aspect of who God is in the night.

If you want to go beyond reading the stories, at the end of each one is a section entitled 'Extras for parents'. This section contains suggestions for how to start a conversation with your children or with your whole family about the key truth presented in the story. It also offers a few suggestions of how to use that key truth to pray and to help your children connect with God in new ways. Lastly, it contains brief 'Parenting for faith' tools to help you feel better equipped to talk about God with your children.

Feel free to use the information in the 'Extras for parents' section as much or as little as you like. The extras are just that—extra. A final additional resource is the FAQ section at the back of the book, which may answer some questions about helping children spiritually at night.

Some parents will find it helpful, as they read through the stories, to create something together as a family to remind them of the foundational truths about God that they are exploring each night. If

you feel your family would benefit from this, you will find some craft suggestions in the FAQ section (see page 130).

However you choose to use this book, please remember that God has placed you perfectly in your children's lives to help them grow to live connected to him. No one can be as spiritually effective in their lives as he has made you to be, and he will walk with you every step of the way.

My prayer is that your family will go on a wonderful journey of transforming the night into a God-filled experience of him, and that you as a parent will feel confident to parent your children through the night as you do through the day.

May God give you deep sleep, endurance and nights filled with joy and peace.

2



God's night light



Exodus 14

Mahlah's heart thumped wildly in the dark as she lay still in the corner of her family's small tent. This was their home now. Outside, the wind continued to whip the tent's thin walls back and forth with a loud slap-slap-slap. Then, something crashed in the distance.

Mahlah felt her little sister Tirzah scoot close to her. 'What is that sound?' Tirzah asked. Her voice was wobbly. 'I don't like the desert.' She shivered and burrowed her face into Mahlah's arm. 'I want to go back to our other home.'

'Oh, little one, we will never go back there.' Mahlah closed her eyes and thought about their old home. So much had happened since their family was woken up in the middle of the night and sent out of Egypt with so many other families. Mahlah knew that Tirzah was too young to really understand what life had been like back there. Their family had been slaves for as long as anyone could remember. They had been forced to work for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and they'd been whipped if they didn't do their work fast enough. Mahlah sighed. It seemed like everyone she knew had been a slave. Every day was hard and sad. She never wanted to go back. But what would happen to them now?

Suddenly, a sharp howl pierced the cold night air, somewhere beyond the tent walls. 'We're going to be eaten by wild animals,' Tirzah moaned. 'I just know it.'

Mahlah pulled her sister even closer and hugged her. Mahlah felt fear squeezing her own heart, too. 'Why would God do this?' she thought. 'Why would he rescue us from

being hurt as slaves, only to bring us into a desert to be eaten by animals or insects, or to be blown away by the wind?' It just didn't make sense.

Mahlah listened to the wind for a while. She thought back to how God had used his cloud to lead her people to the Red Sea. God had led them, and they had followed. But what about now? If this strong wind had blown God's cloud away, then he would not be there to lead them any more. They would be completely on their own. Mahlah wondered if God's cloud *was* still there. She decided she had to find out.

Mahlah carefully folded back her blanket and shuffled through the deep darkness toward the flap-door of the tent. She ran her fingers up along the tent flap to find a small, familiar hole, and then she leaned in close for a look through it.

What Mahlah saw amazed her. God's massive pillar of cloud was still standing tall between the sprawling camp of her people and the faraway darkness of the empty desert. The furious wind had not moved it. God's pillar of cloud was not only still there; it was brightly blazing as if it were filled with intense fire. God had led them out of Egypt and now he was standing guard over them at night. He hadn't left them. Peace poured into Mahlah's body. A smile spread across her face.

She adjusted the tent door flap to stand open slightly, so that a single beam of light from God's pillar of cloud could stream into the tent. Mahlah dropped to her knees and crawled back toward Tirzah, who was curled under their blanket. She gently touched Tirzah's shoulder. 'Open your eyes, Tirzah. Look! Can you see?'

Tirzah raised her head and squinted at the light shining through the hole and down on to her blanket.

Mahlah sat down, close to her sister. ‘That light is from God’s cloud, Tirzah. He is still here with us, even in this scary night. He led us here, and he will continue to lead us to our new home.’

Tirzah ran her fingers gently across the beam of light on her blanket.

Mahlah lay down on their bed. ‘Remember, back at our old home, we had a little candle as a night light, just in case we were scared?’

Tirzah nodded.

‘Well, now we have something better. God is so close to us—he is our night light now.’ Both girls smiled and watched the glow of God as they drifted off to sleep, afraid of nothing.

Extras for parents

Key truth: God is close to us through the night.

Discussion

If you want to discuss this story with your children, here are some suggestions.

First, help your children recognise the key truth from the story. These questions will help you get started:

- What was Mahlah feeling at the beginning of the story?
- How could the Israelites see that God was with them?
- Why did Mahlah stop being afraid when she saw God's light shining from the cloud?

You may want to continue the discussion and broaden your children's understanding of the story's key truth. Choose one or two of these questions to launch a conversation and see where it goes:

- Why do you think God wants to be close to people when they are sleeping?
- As a parent, share a story of a time when you felt that God was close to you at night. What did it feel like and how did you know that God was there? What difference did it make? Invite your children to share their stories.
- We can't see God at night in a pillar of fire, like the Israelites did, but he's still that close. Actually, he is even closer to us. How can we remind ourselves that God is super-close at night?

Pray

If you want to pray with your children, here is a prayer that may serve as a starting point.

Father God, thank you for being so close to us in the night-time. It can feel so lonely at night. Please help our hearts to feel your super-closeness and help our minds to know you are right here as we lie in our beds. Thank you, God.

If you want to help your children connect with God and continue chatting with him on their own, here are a few suggestions. It works best if you make the suggestion and then they chat with God in their

minds or whisper into their hands so that you don't hear. Either way, after you've made the suggestion, pause for at least 30 seconds of quiet time to allow your children to connect with God on their own.

- Encourage your children to chat with God through drawing or writing. Suggest that they draw a picture for God, showing him what their nights feel like now between them and him. Then ask them to flip the paper over and draw a picture for God of what they want their nights to feel like, together with him. Tell them that as they draw, they can tell God about what they are drawing, in their heads or whispering it out loud.
- Ask them to lie quietly and ask God to be with them as they fall asleep. Wait in silence for 30 seconds for your child to connect with God.

'Parenting for faith' tool

Your experience of life with God is one of the most powerful tools you have to help your children grow spiritually. They need insights into what a normal, not-perfect-yet relationship with God looks like, so that they can learn that God is real and is working in the everyday routines of life. Throughout this book, you will be invited to share your experiences with God as well as encouraging your children to share their experiences.

Do not feel pressured to make up any stories or to feel that your experience isn't good enough. Even to say, 'You know, I'm still on this journey, and I really want to experience this for the first time too. I'm excited' is a really important and powerful thing. Your testimony will always be powerful to your children, and they will feel heard and validated when you listen to theirs.

Night-themed Bible stories for families to share together

Sleep, dreams and the night can be mysterious and sometimes troubling. Children can be afraid of the dark, have nightmares and night terrors, sleepwalk, or have insomnia. How do we address their concerns and fears and help them to draw close to God at night? This collection of Bible story retellings exploring God's character and promises will enable parents to help children grow in peace, confidence and understanding of who God is.

Includes:

- Bible story retellings, each including a prayer, direct Bible quotations, and a variety of questions to discuss as wished
- Guidance for parents, including tips on how to encourage children's connection to God at night, and how to troubleshoot specific spiritual and emotional issues that arise around sleep, night and dreams



Rachel Turner has been a full-time children's and families worker and the National Children's Work Coordinator for New Wine, and continues to consult, speak at conferences and run training days for parents, children and youth workers around the UK and Europe. She is the author of the *Parenting Children for a Life of Faith* series.



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