

Wisdom for Watchmen

Scripture notes: *“As iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17).*

The *I Am A Watchman* ministry desires to equip as well as encourage. It is in that spirit that I share a few things I have learned in my many years in ministry. May God bless you as you serve Him.

THINGS I WISH I KNEW 30 YEARS AGO:

God will help you to do what He calls you to do. No matter what it is, if God is prompting or leading you to do it, then He will help you accomplish it. Success is never about our abilities, resources, or plans—it is about sincere believers allowing God to work through them.

The best thing you can do is pray. Jesus prayed constantly. He did this because it was helpful, and to present an example of how we should live (John 13:15). The Apostle Paul encouraged believers to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). A wise pastor said, “The more we need, the more we need to pray.” Through prayer, you will find peace, gain insight, and will strengthen your relationship with God. Remember, God does not require eloquence; just share from your heart. Balance your thank yous with your requests. Ask for guidance, pray for others, and pray that God will help you be all He wants you to be. For additional information on prayer please access our article on 10 Principles of a Powerful Prayer Life.

It’s not about your strength, wisdom, experience, training, or resources. If God was hiring, questions regarding your strengths, training or experience would not be on His job application form. God looks at the heart. The question is, do you have a heart that yearns to live for Him? Be encouraged by this: *God delights in using the unlikely to accomplish the incredible.* That is why, at least in part, God chose a young David to defeat Goliath, the elderly Abraham to become Father of a nation, Amos the tender of sycamore trees to become a great prophet, and Peter the fisherman to become an Apostle and leader in the New Testament Church. When you are a part of spiritual work, the logic of the world does not always apply. Does God choose the best? Sometimes. But often He chooses to use the small, broken, wayward, and humble so that His glory can be magnified in and through us.

Measure success correctly. Again, when you are involved in spiritual work, the logic of the world does not always apply. In the world, one tends to measure success by what they can see—*profit margins, numerical growth, tangible assets, etc.* In the spirit, the opposite is true. In the world, your degree of success is determined by how much you reap. In faith, success is determined by how well you plant. In fact, you may never reap, or see the fruit of your labor. Noah preached for many years while he worked on the ark—no one believed. Jeremiah the prophet preached to family, friends, and countrymen—no one listened. There were times when thousands cheered

Jesus, but in the end, there were few true followers at the cross, and less than 120 believers shortly after the resurrection. Still, Jesus was a success, and so were the others I mentioned, not because they accumulated fame and fortune, but because they were faithful. Being faithful is the primary determinate for success. If you are faithful to do what God calls you to do, no matter what it is (big or small, public, or private), you are a success in His eyes.

Live for an audience of One. Many leaders are tempted to either try to please everyone or, like a dictator, live only to please themselves. Neither approach is the mark of good Christian leadership. Certainly, a selfish, me-focused approach is not God-honoring. And though you may be naturally gifted, trained to lead, and like a General, feel comfortable barking orders, that is not the best approach either. Trying to please everyone may seem like a loving approach, but the leader who tries to please all will soon find it impossible and become discouraged. The answer then is to live for an audience of One—not self, but God. You can't please everyone so don't expect or try to. You should not live just to please yourself because Christ desires, we have a profound love for others (Mark 12:30-31). The answer is to strive to live for God. Discern what **He** wants you to do and do that. Live to please Him and you will have His blessing, and inner peace.

If you are a believer, know that you're wearing a target, and that's OK. It has long been this way, but now especially so. Satan hates those who love God and is on a mission to discourage and destroy those who do (1 Peter 5:8, Luke 22:31). When you became a Christian, you put a target on your back. Satan and his minions will attempt to tempt, trick, and trap you. But remember, the victory is promised, and God stands with you (Heb. 13:5b; Psalm 28:7). As a pastor, I have seen good Christians become very discouraged when difficulties came their way— some even turned their back on God and rather gave up trying to live for Him. What a victory for the enemy. Friend, challenges are coming. There will be setbacks. You will suffer loss. But try to think of your spiritual walk like a football game. The coach (Jesus) has called you to be on His team, to suit-up, go out on the field and play in the big game. It is an honor. And when you are on the football field and the game is in play and you have the ball, the opposing team is going to try to tackle you. They will chase you, grab you, push you, and throw you to the ground. That's how the game is played. And in football, when one is tackled, they do not immediately call foul, or cry to the coach, or ask to be taken out of the game. No, the hit is *expected*, and so is perseverance. Know that the ball is in play. The enemy is on the field, and he will play dirty. Expect the hit. Pray that God will provide courage and the ability to play well.

Know that what works today may not work tomorrow. In the world, we are taught to emulate successful models. How-to books have been the #1 category for book sales for years. We are conditioned to try to discover what a 'successful' person has done and then do what they did. Certainly, there is some wisdom there, however, in the Spirit, we must always be prepared for the possibility that God may lead us down unexpected and new paths. Jesus taught us much about this truth. His entire ministry was an enigma to the religious leaders of His day, who thought that

a Messiah would focus on the Law (like Moses) and be a political/military leader (like David). They were so bound by their expectations and preconceived ideas that they missed His message and His blessing. In Mark 6:8 Jesus told His disciples to prepare for a missionary journey and NOT take provisions. Later, in Luke 22:36, Jesus told the same disciples to prepare for the same kind of journey by doing the opposite—specifically urging them to take extra provisions. The point: Let Jesus lead. Expect the unexpected. Be willing to step out in faith and follow Him even if it has never been done that way before or that's not the way brother Jones successfully did it last month. Don't unnecessarily blaze a new path but be willing to be a trailblazer if that's what God wants you to do. Remain in constant prayer. Ask God to reveal and confirm His will for you.

Though you can accomplish the impossible (in Christ), you are not invincible. Over the years there have been well-intentioned individuals who put themselves in danger or denied themselves (or worse, their children) medical attention claiming that God would protect them. Unfortunately, this approach often yielded terrible and devastating results. Yes, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood in the fire and were kept safe—but that is because they were doing exactly what God had led them to do. It is wrong to think of God as our Genie—a magical being that can be summoned at will and lives to serve as our protector. God protects but does not exist to save us from every foolish choice. In Luke 4, Jesus was tempted by Satan and told to throw Himself off the pinnacle of the Temple. Though He knew it was written that angels would protect Him, He refused to throw Himself down saying, *"It is not right to put the Lord God to the test"* (Luke 4:12). Have faith. Be bold. Attempt great things, but do not put God to the test. Do not step in front of His leading, or outside of His will, for it is there you will find the fullness of His blessing.

Set boundaries—God first, family second and ministry third. Church leaders are vulnerable to burn-out because of the emotional, spiritual, and physical demands of ministry. Yes, a good leader will be available to respond to crisis situations 24/7, but a good leader will also know how to discern what situations require immediate attention, what work can wait, and what work can be delegated. Over the years, too many ministers have neglected their health, and their families, in the pursuit of 'doing God's work.' It is not pleasing to God, or honorable, to neglect family or marriage vows due to non-priority acts of Christian service. Honor God. Keep the Lord first in your life, and don't let good but non-priority work supersede the commitments to your family God wants you to keep. Remember, God first, family second and service third.

Most will not listen. It will not matter how eloquent or clever you are, the truth is, most will not want to hear what you have to say about God, Jesus, the coming Tribulation, or the judgment. Remember, Christ-followers are to gauge success differently than the world does. I challenge you to gauge success not by how many listen, but by how faithful you are to share God's message. Consider this: Ezekiel was one of the great prophets of the Old Testament. Early in his ministry, God told him, *"You will speak my words to them [my people] whether they listen or not, for they are a stiff-necked and rebellious people..."* (Ezek.2:5). In case Ezekiel somehow missed the

message, God repeated the directive two verses later (2:7). Your calling is to communicate God's message. Do your best, be bold but speak in truth and love, and trust that God will take care of the rest.

Delegate. Good managers know how to delegate. They are not threatened by surrounding themselves with people who have exceptional abilities—even abilities exceeding their own. For a time, Moses struggled with this. Having had a fine education (in sharp contrast to the people he was leading who lived in slavery their entire lives), Moses was likely a far more skilled and capable administrator/leader than his countrymen. But attempting to lead almost rather singlehandedly two million people was too much. He grew so weary that he asked God to let him die. Moses' Father-in-law counseled him to enlist helpers—good men who could share the burden of leadership. Moses took the advice and things quickly improved. A good manager's mind thinks in terms of multiplication, not addition. He/she knows that more work can be accomplished when more are trusted and empowered. Yes, it may be tempting to continue doing certain tasks, particularly when you can do it better. But the better path is to train and mentor so that in the end, more are engaged, more become skilled, and more is accomplished—all for the glory of God.

Be transparent. No one is perfect. It's OK to strive to be, but don't pretend to be. When you falter, be quick to acknowledge it humbly, and as appropriate, ask for forgiveness. Don't give up. You're on a learning curve, and some missteps are expected. God's love for you is sure. He does not love some imaginary version of you—He loves you. No masks are required. Be real. Be transparent. Share with others how they can pray for you, what you are learning, and your struggles. Christ-followers are made to be at their best when they learn together, share together, grow together, and work together. Being transparent will help you garner trust and good-will, better your witness, and be a better leader.

Be accountable. Bottom line—there is a direct correlation between limited accountability and maximum vulnerability to sin. Many, many greats have fallen into the trap of thinking that they do not need an accountability structure, and spectacular were their falls. Satan is intelligent and more cunning than we are. He knows how to prey on our vulnerabilities. It is foolish to give him more than he struggles to take. Accountability partners serve as a hedge of protection against Satan's efforts to discourage and destroy. Lines of accountability are not binding, they are a safety net, and a God-honoring structure that good leaders embrace.

Major on the majors. Satan will try to destroy you, but if he can't, he will try to discourage and distract you. As a leader, you are in trouble if you are trying to please everyone, or if you are unsure what the priorities are. Establish priorities. Form a game-plan. Keep lists. Track progress.

In the classic book *Alice in Wonderland* the main character exclaims, "If you don't know where you are going any road will get you there." That is both dead wrong, and deadly. At this point in

history, believers do not have the luxury to meander or get distracted. Those who allow this to happen will become discouraged and less effective in doing the work that is pleasing to God. Problems and interesting options will come your way. Give them proper prayerful consideration and then press-on to accomplish primary objectives. “Major on the majors and minor on minors.” If a minor is, in fact, a major, it will present itself again. Pray, seek counsel, then decide and stick with it. Second guessing yourself or worrying about incidentals is a waste of time and resources. Trust that God will guide your steps and help you to do what He wants you to do.

Speak the truth but speak it in love. There is power in love. I was astounded to learn that one of the leading descriptors of the Messiah in the Gospels is the *compassion* of Jesus—not the power of Jesus or the wisdom of Jesus, but the *compassion* of Jesus. The individuals He ministered to saw it in His eyes, in His countenance, and in His actions. Jesus communicated a strong message, but many listened because it was spoken in love. Speak the truth, but be gentle, wise, and encouraging. Lead with love. The words of those who come across as condescending or judgmental tend to be quickly discarded. Those who use truth as a club will not be effective at communicating God’s message (which is a message of love). Criticism is not a spiritual gift, nor is it an admirable quality. An effective communicator will lead with humility and speak with love as they share the truth of God.

Correct in private, compliment in public. Scripture notes that our every word should be useful for edification (Eph. 4:29). That means, our words should motivate others toward improvement. Sometimes it’s tempting to impulsively vent frustration or want to win your point. But the wise will remember that the goal is not to win the argument or point, it is to win the person. Complimenting in public builds goodwill and strengthens relationship foundations so they can better weather the tough times. Correcting in private guards against the enemy being able to use embarrassment or pride to inflame a situation. Remember, the strength of your relationships is a testimony for the Lord. In John 17 Jesus prayed, *“Father I pray that they [His followers] will be one...so that the world may believe that God sent the Son.”* The quality of your relationships correlates with the strength of your witness. Amazing but true.

When there’s a wrong, seek to make it right. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus spoke of the importance of being a peacemaker. Everyone appreciates peace—but God did not commend those who want peace, He commended those who do what needs to be done to facilitate peace. In general, that means, as you can, you are called to initiate the forgiveness/restoration process (even if you are not at fault). For the sake of your witness and the cause of Christ, you are to call the meeting, seek restoration, forgive first, speak first, hug first, and as appropriate apologize first. Those who hold on to the hurts of the past are likely to get stuck there and miss experiencing joy in the present. Learn from the past but don’t remain there. Be a peacemaker. When you lead in the process of healing and restoration, your life is pleasing to God.

Always seek to know more. The Church in Berea (Acts 17:21) was commended because the people studied the Scriptures daily. The Apostle Paul spoke of running the good race (note that he did not speak of running a good race some years ago—his words indicate that his race/journey was ongoing). Believers are called to grow in the faith (1 Cor. 13). Believers are called to a spiritual walk—not to strike some kind of spiritual pose or stand. Learn and don't stop learning. Serve and don't stop serving. "Pray without ceasing." Know that there is always more to learn and more to do. Ask God for the strength and the hunger to mature in Christ in a way that is pleasing to Him. Take the words of Paul to heart: *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."* (Gal. 6:9)