



## The Watchful Presence

Text: John 14:1  
New Testament: John 14:1-7  
Old Testament: Ps. 31:1-3, 5, 24

Margaret Widdemer was the daughter of a minister from Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Writing poetry was her God-given gift. In 1919, she won the Pulitzer Prize for her collection of poems, *The Old Road to Paradise*. Margaret's appreciation for her mother was captured in her poem, *The Watcher*. It is a beautiful depiction of a mother's attentiveness for her children.

She always leaned to watch for us,  
Anxious if we were late,  
In winter by the window,  
In summer by the gate.

And though we mocked her tenderly,  
Who had such foolish care,  
The long way home would seem more safe  
Because she waited there.

Her thoughts were all so full of us,  
She never could forget!  
And so I think that where she is  
She must be watching yet.

Waiting till we come home to her,  
Anxious if we are late,  
Watching from Heaven's window,  
Leaning on Heaven's gate.

Margaret Widdemer captured the daily effort mothers make to watch out for their children. In all seasons of life, a mother's love keeps watch for her sons



and daughters to reach home safely from their adventures in the world. Her leaning to see the first signs of them, is a constant reminder of her loving heart.

Yet this daily vigil is mocked by those who regard her anxious concern as a burden to their freedom. Margaret Widdemer captures the timeless conflict between youthful independence and parental concern for a son or daughter's safety. Until youth bear children of their own, they don't understand how love that is so deep can generate anxiety while children are away from home.

Even if children have some awareness that their absence from home justifies motherly concern, the greater culture in which children are raised has a term to mock motherly attention. Sincere parental concern for a child's welfare is scorned as "Helicopter Parenting." Parental devotion to their child's welfare is stereotyped as "hovering."

Hovering is ridiculed for stifling a child's creativity at best and interfering with a child's freedom at worst by educated people who ought to know better. Critics resent parents interfering with them while they influence the parents' child by demeaning parental attentiveness. They slander motherly love while substituting themselves for a mother's love.

A child's safety in a mother's sincere love does not accept cheap answers to serious questions about a daughter or sons' welfare. The determined perseverance of a mother's boundless love does not accept a casual dismissal of justifiable concern for her child's welfare.

A watchful mother shows accountability to God for her stewardship of His gift of a child. A watchful mother has learned from God's instruction that evil exists. Sin exists. Children and youth are routinely violated by evil and tempted



to sin. Watchful mothers take personally Jesus' love for children and Jesus' instruction about their responsibility to protect their little ones from stumbling.

It is not that a mother does not trust God or have faith in Jesus' promise of eternal protection. A mother knows the deceitful world in which she has lived as a woman does not respect a woman's sacred dignity or a child's innocence.

Neither does that deceitful world believe it's important for children to love Jesus. She has already walked the walk her children are walking. She has had her share of unwelcome experiences that did not represent Jesus' love that concern her.

Most of all, she's aware that she and Jesus differ. She's powerless to prevent her children's pain and suffering once they leave home. Jesus takes up where children leave their mother's sight. Some mothers carry emotional scars of not being protected by their mother and father from the world's evil. Some mothers carry emotional scars of being unable to protect their children from decisions their sons or daughters have made that jeopardized their life and safety. Too many mothers don't understand why things happened to their children they so carefully tried to prevent.

A mother's awareness that she cannot run interference for every situation her child faces compels her to watch expectantly for her child's safe return. Others see her watchfulness as "hovering." But she is worldly wise.

A mother's attentiveness is safety from the unknown for the child that is loved. Children without such watchfulness are anxious for a mother who daily attends her children. Children abandoned in life's dark streets cry for an earthly guardian angel to be their emotional and spiritual physician and mentor.

They know in a profound way their mother is home. As Walt Whitman once wrote, "Home is where your feet may leave, but not your heart." A mother's



heart is the home that beats in a 24-hour vigilance for her little ones - *like Jesus promises us our heavenly Father does for us.*

A mother's watchfulness reflects her gratitude to God for the gift of her children. She teaches her children that Jesus loves them, to love Jesus, and know that He is with them always - so do not be afraid. These women who love Jesus read John 14: 1 to their little ones, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me." But these brave mothers struggle with the next verses of chapter 14 for they do not want their children to enter the Kingdom of God before they do. It's not yet time for them to go to Jesus' home.

These little ones take their mothers' lessons from Jesus and venture forth unafraid into the world outside their home. The older they become, the more fearless they become. In their fearlessness, they too often mock the heart that beats with love for them while they are away from home.

Each day the mother lets them go a little farther from the home of her heart. But she never forgets her little ones. No matter how old they grow into maturity, they will always be her little ones, her precious children. Her dear, precious gifts from God.

As the years go on, and the watchful presence is less visible in her children's lives, she continues to watch beside her window, her gate, her mailbox, her cell phone, her lap top, praying that her heart is not troubled by the silence of those whose lives are sheltered in her heart.

She has reconciled herself to their awareness of the forces that stand against God's love in this world. They are now mature with children of their own. They have learned through experience the wisdom they were taught by their mother – to watch unafraid, trusting and praying for God's protection of their



little ones. But living with the powerlessness of being unable to protect them beyond their sight.

Her sons and daughters have learned to love, to watch, to hover, to be the guardian angel that is just out of sight, but always present to comfort and protect God's gifts that they might not stumble from Jesus' love or God's blessing.

They struggle with not letting their hearts be troubled like their mother did, while being mocked for the watchfulness they do from the sincerity of their love.

Then the day comes when life has taken its toll on a mother's heart. Her heart comes to rest from its responsibility of watching on earth. She rises on the wings of angels with the expectation that her watching continues, from a new window, a new gate with a greater view, a more encompassing view. She seeks entrance into Jesus' home.

She looks back from whence she came. Now she can see what she could only imagine her children were doing when she lived on earth. She can see where her little ones are going, and their little ones, and their little ones' little ones. She can see the stumbling and falling from faith, hope, and love that Jesus has taught them to cherish from a mother's lap. She can see the teaching of gratitude and penance. She can see the lessons of forgiveness and the restoration of faithfulness, only to have the endless pattern of attentiveness repeat itself.

She can see their anxious faces, watching and waiting for their little ones' return. Jesus is beside her, holding her hand, smiling, "Well-done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in a little. You are faithful now with even more. Continue your watchfulness with joy and thanksgiving.

"Our Father in Heaven honors your watchfulness."



Enter the Kingdom of Heaven and continue being the watchful presence in  
your family's life!

Amen.

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