Have you ever noticed how the sense of listening seemingly comes into play more in darkness than it does in light?

Sometimes, this is due to a sense of danger. Our car breaks down on an obscure road and another vehicle pulls up behind us to assist. The first thing we listen for is the familiarity of the voice of the one approaching.

A jogging athlete caught in descending darkness suddenly becomes tuned to sounds of animals, passing vehicles or approaching footsteps. A child tucked into bed often “hears” things not perceived when light is available in the same environment. It’s amazing how darkness can shift our focus from the sense of light to hearing.

Sometime ago, we were visiting on the porch of some close friends’ rural home. As sunlight faded and darkness crept in, we began to tune into sounds around us, rather than the sights we had observed earlier. Some sounds were soothing and pleasant while others raised questions because of the foreign nature of their origin.

As darkness crept in, it was amazing how many more sounds seemed to surround us than had been the case an hour earlier when the earth was still light. Seemingly, doors creaked louder, sounds came from further away and unfamiliar sounds became more poignant.

The gentle breeze sifting through trees canopied over us was soothing. Distance sounds of locusts, “katie-did,” and whippoorwills created a symphony unique to descending darkness. A cow baying in the distance, laughter from a nearby picnic, the sound of footsteps crackling through leaves all caused us to tune in to the “message” of our darkened environment.

What made the difference? Weren’t these sounds, or similar ones, present when the sun was shining over yellow meadows, flowering trees and white houses? Or did the red barns, multicolored gardens and activity-filled environment disappear with the shading of night?

The obvious answers to all questions is, “neither.” It’s a matter of perceptivity. During the day, we focus on what our eyes see and have an awareness of what we observe around us. When that fades into night, we’re forced to depend on sounds to inform us of our present surroundings.

As I relaxed on the front steps of that home, it occurred to me how much this can be like “life’s senses.” During times when we can “see” what’s going on, we tend to relax and not always tune in to those things that would stimulate our need to listen and meditate. We allow the “sight” to do the work for us.

However, when difficult times seem to obscure the path, we are forced to depend on a sense of “listening” to guide us through the darkness. Listening to the encouragement of our support people, or friends, or the voice of God alone leads us through life’s night experiences.

The concept of “uncharted territory” or walking through areas strange to our familiar surroundings always pose challenges, but it also allows us to become more keen in relation life’s happenings. Once we have learned to tune in, it is possible to move from a position of fear and concern to that of becoming a guide to others who are just beginning a journey that we have traveled.

“Eyes of understanding” open and we see things that we have never seen before. There is a contemporary Christian song that requests, “Open the eyes of my heart, Lord.”

The scriptures assure us that “God gives us songs in the night,” or “weeping may endure for a night, joy comes in the morning.” And by listening for the unseen rhapsodies of the night, we discover songs of grace that were there all along, but went undetected during times of light.

The more we travel through unfamiliar territory, the more we understand the meaning that the writer of Psalms understood when he wrote, “If I say, surely the darkness shall hide me, the night shall be my light. For you (God), darkness itself is not dark, and night shines as the day. For darkness and light are the same to you.” (Psalm 139:11,12).