



The people who  
walked in darkness  
have seen  
a great light.  
— Isaiah 9:2a

## Longest Night Milestone Moment

The longest night happens twice a year at the winter solstice. In the northern hemisphere it occurs around December 21 and in the southern hemisphere it happens around June 21. The winter solstice occurs when one of the Earth's poles has its maximum tilt away from the sun and a new solar cycle begins.

At the winter solstice, especially in the colder regions, everything lies dormant as the weather begins a slow build toward brighter and warmer days. Over the years people have gathered around an outdoor fire sharing hot drinks, fruit, nuts, songs, and stories as they celebrated renewed light and warmth.

Sometimes the regrets of the previous year are written on paper and thrown into the fire to symbolize leaving those regrets behind and focusing on the year to come. Often, festivities continued inside with music, a large feast meal, candles, and a Yule log dessert.

For Christians, the longest night is traditionally also a day to show love and concern for friends and family members who are struggling with darkness and grief over losing loved ones during the year. In the northern hemisphere it is sometimes referred to as "Blue Christmas" as it occurs two to three days before Christmas. It is an occasion to reflect on and remember God's love for us as we support and reassure others who are dealing with grief during this time of year.

The opportunity for families and friends to gather together to celebrate the longest night is a special time. This Longest Night Milestone Moment has a simple five stage structure that includes naming, equipping, blessing, gifting, and reinforcing so that the Milestone Moment has a greater chance to take deeper root in lifelong faith formation.

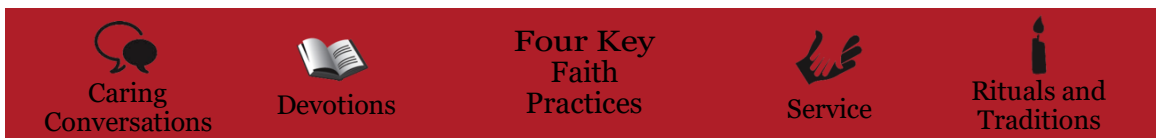
**Naming** – Observing the Longest Night encourages us to remember God's love for us as we share our Christian love to let go of regrets and find comfort in our losses. This happens through caring conversations, fellowship, and acts of kindness.

**Equipping** – Celebrating the Longest Night with food, singing, caring conversations, and prayer nurtures our Christian faith and allows us to share our care and concern for others.

**Blessing** – Offering a Longest Night blessing reminds us of God's presence in our lives and of the importance of friends and family as we welcome the coming brighter and warmer days.

**Gifting** – Providing each person a rituals and traditions stone and/or small gifts of flowers, treats, or candles reinforces the memory of this special day.

**Reinforcing** – Consider taking a picture of your time together around the fire or feast and keep it in a visible place. As you look at the picture, let it remind you to continue to pray, support, and encourage your loved ones in the coming year.



# + Longest Night Milestone Moment

## *For a Small Group or Family Gathering*



### *Growing People in Faith when at Home and Away*

*“and talk about them when you are at home and when away, when you lie down and when you rise.”*

– Deuteronomy 6:7b

*A follow-up for the Longest Night Milestone Moment can be done with caring conversations to remember God’s loving presence in our lives and share hope and care to others around us. Be intentional by scheduling future opportunities for additional faith-filled conversations with loved ones. Speaking of hope and God’s love with others builds and strengthens our relationships.*

*An important step after experiencing the Four Key Faith Practices in small groups or home setting is to bless and equip friends and families by using faith practices daily as an intentional step to encourage faith traditions in the home.*

*Suggested resources for continued caring conversations:*

*[Taking Faith Home](#)  
[Taking Faith Home Cards](#)  
[For Everything A Season Book](#)*

*Additional Milestone Modules and Moments can be found at:  
[www.milestonesministry.org](http://www.milestonesministry.org)*



At the heart of equipping people for their lifelong faith formation are the Four Key Faith Practices: Caring Conversations, Devotions, Service, and Rituals and Traditions. They provide an opportunity for people to learn, experience, and grow in their faith together. The outline below is also found on the next page to be used as a discussion guide handout to assist with the conversations.



As you gather together, begin by sharing a recent mountain high and/or valley low in your lives and then use the outline below to talk about faith, hope, and God’s presence in this moment.



#### **Caring Conversations**

Discuss these thoughts and questions:

- What regret from the past year do you wish to let go of?
- What are some of your hopes for the coming year?
- How does the thought of brighter and warmer days ahead make you feel and why?



#### **Devotions**

Read the following:

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*  
John 1:5 (NRSV)

- Darkness is associated with sadness, fear, or regrets. Tell a story of when you were sad, afraid, or had regrets.
- Jesus is the light shining in the darkness. How does knowing this give you hope?



#### **Service**

Not everyone has someone to be with during these long nights. This time can bring back memories or intensify feelings of loneliness and a sense of loss. How can you reach out to someone who may be feeling sad or lonely at this time?



#### **Rituals and Traditions**

One tradition is to place *luminarias* (paper bags with sand or kitty litter in the bottom and a small candle) along the entrance sidewalk to welcome visitors during the evening. In order to celebrate the light of Jesus, provide everyone with a battery operated tea candle to keep lit during the entire night. Light a centerpiece candle during dinner to represent God’s love shining through the darkness in the world.

Sing or listen to the hymn, *Gather Us In*. Then pray: *Almighty and living God, give us hope and confidence and let your light shine upon us during the coming year. Amen.*

Conclude with this Longest Night blessing: *May the light of Christ shine brightly for you and bless you with hope.*



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# Longest Night Discussion Guide



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