

ON SLEEP

a Bible study

by Zachary Groff

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BIG IDEA

We are exhausted. Disruptive technology has made our lives much more fast-paced, interconnected, and sleep deprived. Yet as influential as new tech may be, voluntary sleep deprivation and neglect is primarily related to the spiritual problem of pride. God has given us sleep as a gift that not only restores our feeble human minds and bodies so that we can better glorify Him, but also illustrates the spiritual rest and joy promised in Christ Jesus.

OPENING QUESTIONS



ASK: *What role does sleep play in your life?*

ASK: *What does our creaturely need for sleep tell us about who we are?*

BIBLE DISCUSSION



READ: *Psalm 36:5*

Your lovingkindness, O Lord, extends to the heavens, Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.

In this verse, the Psalmist provides us with an analogy between the sky and God's holy goodness. Both are infinite in their expanse. Likewise, God gives us a picture of spiritual rest through the analogy of physical sleep.



ASK: *What are we admitting when we enter into physical rest, and how does this relate to salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ? On the flipside, what might we be saying when we actively deny ourselves physical rest?*

POSSIBLE RESPONSE: God has created us as dependent beings. We need rest. We depend upon it. Without it, we would self-destruct. When we deny ourselves the rest that we need, we implicitly deny the truth that we need it. This relates to salvation insofar as we depend upon God to provide for us when we cannot provide for ourselves. We rest on Christ's righteousness when we approach God—we do not depend upon our own righteousness.



READ: Hebrews 4:1-11

1 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. **2** For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. **3** Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

“So I declared on oath in my anger,

‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world. **4** For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “On the seventh day God rested from all his works.” **5** And again in the passage above he says, “They shall never enter my rest.”

6 Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, **7** God again set a certain day, calling it “Today.” This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted:

“Today, if you hear his voice,

do not harden your hearts.”

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. **9** There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;

10 for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. **11** Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

Just as people who are asleep have entered into their slumber, believers, through faith in Jesus Christ, are entering into the spiritual rest prepared for them beforehand by the Father.



ASK: Consider the voluntary insomniac who actively resists sleep. In terms of this passage (especially verse 11), what word(s) might we use to describe resistance to the things of God (including sleep and rest)?

POSSIBLE RESPONSE: In biblical terms, resistance to the things of God is disobedience against His righteous revealed will. It is on account of their disobedience that unbelievers and rebels fail to enter into God’s rest (verse 11).

ARTICLE

RESTING IN THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

BY ZACHARY GROFF

Our ever-increasing use of electronic devices has come to present a deep spiritual problem in a new, more technologically advanced, form. As influential as new technology may be, voluntary sleep deprivation and neglect is primarily related to the spiritual sickness of pride rather than exclusively to the unique challenges presented by modernity. As one correspondent for NPR put it, "I live and report in New York City, and there is definitely a kind of pride or resignation here about lack of sleep."

But sleep is more than an inconvenience. In a society that values maximum productivity, the biblical injunction to "do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31) in relation to sleep may seem difficult to apply. Sleep is a God-given gift intended to sustain us physically and humble us spiritually, enabling us better to glorify God. In sleep, we not only prepare for the day ahead, but we admit our inescapable dependence on God as our Creator and Sustainer.

Believers surrender to God because He is uniquely qualified to receive our absolute trust. One expression of God's infinite power, goodness, and trustworthiness is that "He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121:4). God's people literally lay their heads down at night, trusting their infinitely good God to keep them in His watchful care, regardless of what danger may lurk in the shadows of the night. Those who truly trust in the saving grace of God will not only be assured in their minds and become secure in the Father's care, but they will reflect that assurance in their lives, perhaps preeminently in experiencing daily physical rest in spite of the many demands on their time.

Sleep itself is also an instrument of general revelation, in that God makes known to all men and women their common and desperate need for God's protection through the night. Even more, healthy sleep provides occasions for daily thanksgiving. Even if a man has nothing else, to awake in the morning full of life and breath provides him with great cause for gratitude to God.

Sleep is a divine gift to humankind in that it makes plain the basic human need to depend on God. This should produce in us humility and thanksgiving as we relate to God as our Creator, Sustainer, and Protector. Sleep is especially a gift to Christian believers. It anticipates, by way of analogy, the promised rest described in Hebrews 4. Sleep gives us a daily opportunity to entrust ourselves to the care and provision of the Lord. It can also become a means of surrender to God's design for our bodies in the day-to-day rhythms of

life, for nothing is more fundamental to physical well-being than regular, consistent, restful sleep.

But the act of sleep should also remind us of the Gospel: God's gracious deliverance of His people out of spiritual deadness, and into new life in Christ. Waking up in the morning provides a picture of our spiritual awakening by the power of the Holy Spirit—that moment when our spiritual eyes were opened to the Truth of Scripture and the sufficiency of God's grace in Christ. It also ought to remind us of our experience of sanctification, as God progressively makes us more and more like Christ in this life. Finally, it is a reminder of the promise of future resurrection.

In order to honor God through sleep, we must recognize that we should devote the entire day to serving and glorifying God. Diligence in work leads to ease in resting at the right time. This allows for renewed and reinvigorated diligence in our labors when we awake. By recognizing the spiritual significance of sleep, we take a fresh approach to slumber by regarding it as a cause for thanksgiving rather than as an inconvenience, or "necessary evil."

DISCUSSION

Follow up on any thoughts or questions from the article. Use these questions to encourage application of the article's content in daily living.



ASK: *What are we "saying" when we neglect, abuse, or disregard sleep?*

POSSIBLE RESPONSE: Fundamentally, we are expressing prideful self-reliance on our own judgment rather than humble submission to God's design for our physical well-being. We are spurning God's gift of rest as well. In biblical terms (Hebrews 4:11), we are disobeying God when we refuse to enter into rest (spiritual and physical).



ASK: *What things in our lives make it difficult to fully receive the divine gift of restful slumber?*

POSSIBLE RESPONSE: Insecurity, anxiety, and the worries of this world all contribute to restlessness. Also, mundane obstacles exist, like poor diet, lack of exercise, and physical laziness throughout the day. Our culture of uber-productivity and never-ending connectivity certainly does not encourage healthy sleep habits.



ASK: *How might we prepare for sleep?*

POSSIBLE RESPONSE: Reflect upon the spiritual significance of actively entrusting oneself to the Lord's care. Pray that God would protect you and provide you with mental and physical recuperation, that you would be better able to glorify and enjoy him in the morning and throughout the following day. Thank God for the gift of sleep. Consider the need to demonstrate the Holy Spirit fruit of self-control throughout the day (dietary habits, diligence in work, exercise) in order to procure restful sleep. Even set a curfew or bedtime for yourself, if need be. None of this is mandatory, but it may be helpful for cultivating a healthy appreciation for and utilization of the gift of sleep.



ASK: *What can we think, say, or do when we wake up to appreciate sleep?*

POSSIBLE RESPONSE: First and foremost: thank God for the gift of another night of sleep and rest. Puritan author Henry Scudder (1585-1662) wrote, "In the instant of awaking let your heart be lifted up to God with a thankful acknowledgment of his mercy to you.... For, while you sleep, you are as it were out of actual possession of yourself, and all things else. Now, it was God that kept you, and all that you had, and restored them again, with many new mercies, when you awaked." Reflect upon how waking up from sleep images aspects of salvation: regeneration (waking up to the Truth of God's Word), sanctification (dying to sin and living to Christ), and the promise of future resurrection (waking up at the Last Day).



ASK: *How might healthy sleep make us more like Christ?*

POSSIBLE RESPONSE: Most simply, Christ slept healthily. When we trust God enough to sleep healthily, we are being like Jesus Christ, as we know of Him from the Gospels (Matthew 8, Mark 4, Luke 8). Healthy sleep patterns will assist us in putting to death sins like anxiety, paranoia, doubt, stress, and unwarranted crankiness. Healthy sleep patterns also help us actively pursue holy living in that they promote productivity, faithfulness, temperance, purity, and self-control in every aspect and area of life. Seriously, how much better would it be to be energized by healthy sleep than by coffee?

EXERCISE

Reflect upon, and write out (briefly) your daily activity. What does this information tell you about your regard, or lack thereof, for God's gift of physical rest? What might that say about your regard for His gift of spiritual rest in Christ?

For the next week/month/semester, commit to reflecting on some biblical truth about Christ's goodness and beauty as Savior immediately before going to sleep. For example, read a short passage of Scripture that reminds you of Christ's excellence (Ephesians 1, John 14, John 10, Romans 8). Or, read secondary literature that focuses on Christ (i.e. *The Preciousness of Christ* by Octavius Winslow, *The Grace of Christ* by William S. Plumer, *Knowing Christ* by Mark Jones, and *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer).

Keep a journal of thanksgiving (or a section in your current journal/diary) in which you record two or three specific items for which you are thankful at the end of each day. Commit to do this before going to bed every day for a month, and then spend an hour reviewing what you have recorded at the end of the exercise.

WRAP UP

Sleep provides us with a daily reminder of several universal spiritual realities. The primary reminder is that we are created beings dependent upon an infinite, ever-wakeful and watchful God. As such, we should receive sleep with gratitude as a divine gift. We should neither neglect nor abuse it, lest we do violence to the image of God, which we bear. This is especially important for God's children since He calls us to glorify Him as He renews us in every aspect of our being after His image. This doxological motivation for taking care of our bodies must accompany us as we make our pilgrimage through this world to our heavenly home, rest stops included.

PRAYER

Father, you are so good to us.

You have created us with an inescapable need to depend upon You. You sustain us daily through physical gifts that remind us of spiritual realities.

Our physical rest is one of these divine gifts. Help us, Lord, to submit to Your good design for our sleep as a fundamental requirement of our lives. Please remind us of our spiritual neediness as well, and the divine rest of salvation that we have in Christ Jesus.

Be glorified in all that we do, including our rest.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

And so to Bed...: A Biblical View of Sleep by Adrian Reynolds

Crazy Busy: A (Mercifully) Short Book about a (Really) Big Problem by Kevin DeYoung

The Christian's Daily Walk by Henry Scudder

Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life by John Calvin

You Lift Me Up: Overcoming Ministry Challenges by Albert Martin

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