

Sleep Well

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[0 : 00] I pray the Lord my soul to keep, and if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. For generations, children have prayed this prayer before they go to bed at night.

Isn't it strange that although we spend on average a third of our lives asleep, and are at our most vulnerable when we are asleep, this is the only prayer I could find on the subject of going to sleep. Perhaps we don't take sleep seriously enough as Christians. Many of us struggle with sleep. Some sleep too much, some sleep too little, some sleep too deep, some sleep too light, and so on. Many older people among us struggle to go to sleep or to stay asleep. Many younger among us struggle to wake from being asleep.

Given that sleep deprivation, according to any measure, is at epidemic levels in our Western societies, psychologists and counsellors have started talking about something called sleep hygiene.

[1 : 17] How to get a good night's sleep. Now generally, I don't really struggle with going to sleep or staying asleep. However, a couple of months ago, I woke up with a start.

I was having a nightmare, and try as hard as I might, I couldn't get back to sleep for days afterwards. During those strange few days of tossing and turning, I resolved to study a little of what the Bible had to say about sleep hygiene.

In the providence of God, three weeks ago at the prayer meeting, one of our own congregations said, I'm struggling with sleep. By that time, I had already written this sermon.

Isn't that providential? All things being equal, I think there's something for all of us here. Something gospel, something Jesus-oriented, something restful.

Now I know that there are some among us who have been diagnosed with medical problems concerning sleep. And it's not as if I've got nothing to say to you.

[2 : 24] I hope that you find at least something I say helpful. But the majority of us would probably sleep just a little bit more restfully if we would put a few of the principles of the Bible into practice.

It's not like me to get really so practical, is it? Just before you say I'm getting all too practical here, let's reflect on how the worst form of torture to which a human being can be exposed is extreme sleep deprivation.

Well, it seems to me from studying Scripture that we need to consider two issues when it comes to sleeping well. First, preparing for sleep.

And secondly, waking from sleep. Preparing for sleep and waking for sleep. And trust me, I am no expert on this, as my wife will tell you.

I'm preaching this because I need to learn this more and more. Preparing for sleep. The vast majority of the advice that sleep hygiene therapists will give you concerns what you do before you go to bed.

[3 : 40] How to prepare for sleep. So much of the advice is very useful. Limiting your TV viewing time. Your caffeine intake. The time you spend on the computer before you go to bed.

I guess in years past, it was a cup of hornyc and a good book. Given that human beings have always needed to sleep, and that the Bible is full of experiences had by normal human beings, it's not surprising that it's full of wisdom for how to prepare for sleep.

Of course, before we enter into this advice, let's remember the words of Psalm 127 verse 2. Sleep is God's gift to those he loves.

It is a gift of his grace. Well, having said that, let me list three areas in which we as Christians can prepare for sleep. First in the mind, second in the conscience, and third in the body.

Now, I am not a professional in this subject. I've said that before. I'm saying it again. I admit the only reason I started studying what the Bible has to say on this subject is because I had a nightmare and went through a few days of really restless sleep.

[4 : 56] And yet, I do hope that there is something for all of us. Because after all, if the gospel does not impact all of life, including sleep, it impacts none of it. First of all, prepare for sleep well in the mind.

In the mind. The question we want to deal with here is this. Are you resting in the protection of your loving Heavenly Father?

Are you resting in the protection of your loving Heavenly Father? Do you believe that God doesn't just watch over you by day, but also through the night? That his care over you is sleepless and indefatigable?

I rather think we as evangelical Christians struggle with this because our concept of the grace of God is so deficient. We think that we always must be up and doing in the service of God, working tirelessly for God, lest he consider us lazy, being happy with us.

We forget that it's not what we do for God which dictates his attitude toward us. It is what God has done for us in the giving of his Son, Jesus Christ.

[6 : 08] Just because we can't do anything for God when we're asleep, doesn't mean he's going to stop watching over us. Doesn't mean he's going to love us any the less than he already does.

I found Psalm 121 to be one of the most amazing Psalms in the Bible for someone who's struggling with restless sleep.

Its major theme is that God keeps us and sustains us, that he's our help and our strength.

Alongside Psalms like Psalm 23, 130 and 40, Psalm 121 is probably the most popular Psalm in the Psalter.

Listen to what the Psalmist writes in verses 3 and 4. He will not let your foot be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber.

Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. In other words, we may be asleep, but God does not sleep. We may sleep, and God will watch over us and protect us and help us.

[7 : 12] Be assured of this in your mind, that though you may be asleep, God continues his loving and strong watch over you. Though you think you may be at your most vulnerable, you have a bodyguard who is watching over you while you sleep.

Be convinced of that in your mind. Drive it home into your heart, perhaps, by memorizing Psalm 121. But then there are other Psalms which help us as we prepare for sleep.

For example, in Psalm 3, David is on the run. He's got many foes and they all want to kill him. Yet in verse 5 he says, I lay down and slept.

I woke again, for the Lord sustained me. No matter how many enemies he has, no matter how dark their purposes for him are, he is confident that the sustaining grace of God will be with him.

That the God who helps him in the day will help him in the night also. Because this is who our God is. The God who's sustaining grace is with us when we lie down and sleep.

[8 : 29] The Lord who sustains us when we wake. But there's something even more fundamental to consider here. In Psalm 4, David's in distress.

And he's crying out to God for help. And in verse 8, David confidently rests in the loving grip of his heavenly Father. And he says, In peace I will both lay down and sleep.

For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. In peace I will both lay down and sleep. And that peace to which David refers in that psalm is the word shalom.

The peace that comes as a result of being in relationship with God. We're going to look more at this in a moment. But the question David is asking in this psalm is this.

Are you at peace with God? Have you believed the gospel? Are you trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as your saviour and Lord? In many ways, the gospel you know provides the best of mind preparations for sleep.

[9 : 41] Because on account of Christ's work for us, we are at peace with God. In peace, we may both lay down and sleep.

So, that's in the mind. Second, in the conscience. We're preparing for sleep in the conscience. The Hebrew poets could have told us this, but modern medicine is growing in its awareness of how a human being is a psychosomatic whole.

It is estimated that nearly 50% of physical symptoms presented to a general practitioner are caused by stress. In the same way, a good diet, exercise, and weight control are essential elements of mental well-being.

The human conscience is a more effective alarm clock than anything you can buy on Amazon. It can keep you from sleeping more effectively than a jackhammer. Well, in Psalm 32, David feels simply awful.

He is a win of his sin. It's pressing down on his part and it's on his body. His conscience is convicting him. Listen to what he says in verses 3 and 4.

[11:01] When I kept silent, all my bones wasted away through my groaning all the day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me.

My strength was dried up by the heat of the night. Now, albeit day and night is a Hebrew term for always, David is only to aware that when he is awake, he feels convicted and guilty.

And when he is asleep, he feels convicted and guilty. His guilt is keeping him from sleeping. I think we've all been in this situation where a guilty conscience keeps us awake.

Our eyes are closing with weariness, but our conscience keeps jerking us awake. Our sin replays in our mind and conscience like a broken record.

Just when we feel as if we're going to get to sleep, the record jumps, begins again. It's like an unseen hand is pressing down on our hearts.

[12:08] There's a reason we talk about someone sleeping the sleep of the just. King David found the answer to his physical symptoms consisted in confessing his sin to God, to laying bare his heart and telling God how it was with him.

So if your conscience is convicting you, don't wait for the morning. Get up out of bed. Confess your sin there and then.

Get out of your bed straight onto your knees. Remember the promise that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins.

Remember the promises of the gospel. Lay bare your heart to God. Clear your conscience. Let him restore the experience of his pleasure in you. Clear your conscience. Confess your sin.

It will do wonders for your sleep. And what's true for our sin against God is also true for our sin against one another. That our guilt at sinning against another person can keep us from sleeping.

[13:23] We play the words we spoke to them over and over in our minds or the words they spoke to us and sleep eludes us. The best preparation for sleep is to ensure that not just our relationship with God is right but that to the best of our ability our relationships with other people are right also.

That we have been reconciled with them and I've made a full apology to them for what we did wrong. So the first question was this are you resting in the protection of your loving heavenly father?

The second is this have your sins been forgiven by your loving heavenly father? Have you come to Jesus for rest from the power of sin? Again although preparing for sleep is really such a practical issue the gospel provides the best of all conscience preparations because on account of Christ's work for us all our sins have been forgiven in peace we may both lie down in sleep.

The third way to prepare for sleep is in the body in the body. Common sense isn't common. never has been never will be especially not for ministers. Sometimes even the simplest of things Walter's smiling because he knows it's true the simplest of things are just too complicated for guys like me.

[15:01] For example could the reason we can't sleep be because we're not tired that we haven't done enough to make ourselves tired? In Ecclesiastes 5 verse 12 the writer tells us sweet is the sleep of a laborer whether he eats little or much but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.

Again in Psalm 127 that famous unless the Lord builds the house Psalm the psalmist writes it is it is vain that you rise up early and go late to rest eating the bread of anxious toil for he gives to his beloved sleep.

Well what's the message for us here? If we want to protect our sleep we will protect ourselves and avoid the extremes first of underworking and second of overworking.

Underworking can be a problem not a huge problem in today's western society but a problem nonetheless. We're constantly tired but we can't sleep because although we could we're not really working at all.

And when I say work I'm using it in the widest possible definition of the word from housework to the school from the office to university from the garage to the hospital sitting around the television all day watching Netflix eating popcorn will result in poor sleep.

[16 : 26] The Bible tells us that a laborer's sleep is sweet to him. He works hard he sleeps well. The commandment tells us six days shall you labor and rest on the seventh.

Listen again make sure that for those six days you are working hard. It's only then can you enjoy your rest. But overworking can also be a problem.

Huge problem in our society today overworking. I found myself waking up multiple times a night because I just can't leave the emails behind me. Can't shut off.

Working just too many hours a week. Exhausted. But our minds are filled with a thousand tasks we think we need to do. We haven't learned the vanity of rising early and resting late and eating the bread of anxious toil.

one would hope experience would teach it to us but it doesn't always. One would hope that being a Christian releases us from the pressure to unrelenting toil and overwork but it doesn't.

[17 : 41] the point is that just as we can't reduce our lack of sleep down to a medical problem so we can't ignore that our bodies are factors in our sleep.

Jesus slept on a stormy boat in the sea of Galilee because he was exhausted and he trusted in the protection of his father. If you're not sleeping well and again remember my references here are not to those of us who have medical diagnoses because I'm not a practitioner anyway but if we are not sleeping well could it be that we are either underworking or overworking?

Neither is a healthy state of affairs. I'm the worst offender. But do you really have to check your emails just before you go to bed? Do you really have to check the BBC website to see what the latest news is just before you go to bed?

Do you really need to look at your Facebook page just before you go to bed? Is that really not necessary? It isn't the best way to prepare yourself for bed.

To give yourself just one more stress point right there right there. So preparing for sleep. Most of what I'm saying is common sense but it's also taken from the teaching of the Bible.

[19 : 03] But then as I've already said whether in mind or in conscience or in body the best preparation for sleep consists in the gospel. Because on account of Christ's work on our behalf all our sins have been forgiven.

In peace we may both lie down and sleep. So preparing for sleep. Secondly waking from sleep. waking from sleep. Now Psalm 63 verse 6 is one of the most precious verses in the Bible to the person who struggles with waking up from sleep in the middle of the night.

Listen to what it says. On my bed I remember you. I think of you through the watches of the night. For the night owls among us who wake up multiple times during the night maybe.

This is such a wonderfully encouraging verse. Because the night can be full of dangers. There's the danger of temptation. In 2nd Samuel 11 verse 2 it was when David got up late at night that he succumbed to the temptations of lust concerning Bathsheba.

[20 : 22] Or it could be the danger of anxiety. In Psalm 91 verse 5 in a verse many of us find very precious especially at this time of COVID pandemic.

The writer reminds us of God's protection and says you will not fear the terror of night nor the arrow that flies by day nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness nor the plague that destroys at midday.

Listen again to these dangers of night. The terror of night. The pestilence that stalks in darkness. For those of us who wake up suddenly during the night we can find ourselves beset by temptation surrounded by various anxieties.

What then is the solution? Well surely partly at least it is to return to the wise counsel of Psalm 63 verse 6. On my bed I remember you. I think of you through the watches of the night.

Let me suggest as we come to the end three very brief and practical steps for dealing with waking from sleep in the middle of the night and finding yourself either beset by temptations or surrounded by anxieties.

[21 : 44] Reading. Meditating. Praying. Reading first of all. Reading. Always keep a Bible beside your bed.

Always. Keep it on top of your bedside cabinet. Bible big enough with writing big enough that when you wake up another night and turn on your bedside lamp you can easily read the writing and don't have to strain your eyes like I do.

It's natural when you wake up from sleep your mind is disturbed for a while. The late great Martin Lloyd-Jones once said I remember this I can't find the quote anywhere but I remember reading it but

when out of nowhere a bad thought comes into your mind at night it is most certainly from the devil. He said that. Rather than allow the devil free reign fill your mind with the words of scripture keep passages of scripture which are very precious to you like Psalm 121 bookmarked so that you can go straight there and not get distracted into pick and mixing opening the Bible whatever because the devil can direct your finger just as easily as he can distract your mind.

It might be Psalm 23 with its wonderful assurance that God is our shepherd he'll be with us even in the valley of shadows when beset with anxieties. It might be Matthew 11 where Jesus promises that in him the weary and heavy burdened can find rest.

[23 : 21] It might be 2 Corinthians 4 with its incredible theology of gospel treasures in charge of clay. When I wasn't well a few years ago and I had to take time off I'd wake up in the night I'd have a Bible beside my bed and I'd turn to 1 Corinthians 1.

And it's wonderful teaching on the nature of grace and how the gospel is our shield and protection. Reading. Keep a Bible beside your bed and when you wake up rather than allowing yourself to ruminate on past failures and allowing the devil to fill you with shame at the person that he tells you you are.

Open your Bible and let God speak to you through his word. Reading. Second, meditating. Meditating.

You will notice in Psalm 63 verse 6 the psalmist speaks of remembering God on his bed and thinking of him through the watches of the night. The older translation spoke of meditating on God. How important it is, isn't it, that we learn how to meditate on God. How to fill our minds with the good things of God rather than allow the devil or our anxious thoughts to fill us with fear.

[24 : 47] Meditation seems such a modern word but in reality it's an age-old practice. Our forefathers were experts in meditation.

Biblical meditation consists not in emptying one's mind but in filling one's mind with scripture and then thinking through how that scripture applies into one's own life.

Let's take an example. We wake up in the night, turned on our bedside lamp and we opened our Bible to one of our bookmarked passages, it's Psalm 1-2-1.

And in verse 3 we read in Psalm 1-2-1, he will not let your foot be moved, he who keeps you will not slumber. That's the verse you read.

Think about what that verse says about God. He will not let, he will not allow, he will not permit. God has authority over everything that would harm us, those so called terrors of the night.

[26 : 00] He keeps us, he sustains us, he protects us, whatever pestilence is stalking in the night time, he will keep us from it. He will not slumber, he will not sleep.

When we sleep, he is awake and nothing passes him by. God's watching out for you. Yes, even in the night when no one else is watching out for you.

Let God's Holy Spirit fill your mind with a fresh knowledge of how secure you are in the grip of Christ. Third, praying, praying.

If you're anything like me, your mind is your worst enemy. Your own mind is your worst enemy. we tell ourselves things that aren't true about ourselves.

We tell ourselves that the worst of all things will happen to us tomorrow. Or we end up ruminating over all the mistakes we made yesterday.

[27 : 09] Don't let your anxieties and your temptations speak into your hearts uninterrupted.

Rather, interrupt them with prayer. Turn the scriptures you are reading and the meditations of your heart into prayer.

Let's go back to the previous example. Pray through what it means for God to have authority over all things. Yes, even over the terrors of the night.

Tell him that you need to experience that authority right now. Tell him that you need the assurance that he is protecting you from the pestilence that stalks in the darkness and you need that experience right now.

Tell him you're desperate to know the comfort of knowing that while you sleep, he watches. Tell him you need that comfort right now.

It is amazing how often as we read, meditate, and pray through these great gospel themes of God's fatherly grace, we will fall asleep again.

[28 : 24] And you know, when I was a student, I would always fall asleep at night and feel terribly guilty as I was reading my Bible and my eyes were so guilty. that you are falling asleep while

praying, think of it more in terms of rejoicing that you are falling asleep in your father's safe love.

Rather than feeling guilty that you are falling asleep while praying, think of it more in terms of rejoicing that you're falling asleep in your Father's safe love.

So, sleep hygiene. It's this thing that these days counsellors are paid £100 an hour to advise us on how to get a good night's sleep. My advice to you is this.

Prepare well for sleep and then plan for what you're going to do if you should wake from sleep. But over them all, put on the gospel of Jesus Christ, which frees you from anxiety to live in the liberty and joy of the children of God.