

How to Rest Well

“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9).

“It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep” (Psalm 127:2).

I am writing on a subject I am not an expert on. My wife would probably go a step further and declare me a hypocrite. From at least the physical viewpoint throughout my adult life, I have not spent as much time in bed resting as I needed to. It is akin to a glutton writing on how to stay thin or a chain smoker on how to quit smoking or a spendthrift writing on how to be frugal. Although much of my adult life I have been sleep deprived, I am now making an effort to rest well. So I write these words as one who is in the process of learning. I have learned I am able to function better with a proper amount of sleep. Benefits that come with proper rest are fewer headaches, better concentration on my tasks at hand, less irritability, not being sleepy throughout the day and just an overall feeling of wellness. There are times when we can become so sleep deprived that the symptoms are comparable to the flu.

I am a “Johnny-come-lately” to the belief in sleep. Allow me to give in testimonial form a brief treatise on how to rest well. Even though I am referring primarily to the physical aspect, it does translate over (as our Lord intended) to the beauty of entering in and appreciating our spiritual rest.

1. Go to bed and stay there until you have received the proper amount of rest.

Psalm 127:2 says, *“It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.”* If we consider sleep as a gift, it will change any jaded attitude toward receiving it. One of my problems of developing a lifetime of sleep deprivation is that a couple of my heroes flaunted their lack of sleep. I was impressed with these men of God and I believed that their personal habits were key to attaining the power of God that rested on their lives. As a rule, people that have been used of God can be used as models to help guide our personal disciplines. I have learned much by observing the study habits, sermonizing technique, prayer lives, and behavior that becomes holiness. Paul tells us in the Word of God, *“For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you”* (II Thessalonians 3:7). I like the way my dad said it: “Follow me as I follow Christ, but no further.” That is a good principle. Peter said, *“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His (Christ’s) steps”* (I Peter 2:21). Even well meaning men and women of God fail in this respect at times. One of my mentors often bragged that he averaged three to four hours of sleep per night, so in my young adulthood I eagerly followed suit. I do believe that some can function on less sleep than others, however, few (if any) are wired for only three to four hours of sleep per night. God has designed our bodies

that only with occasional exceptions we can manage on less sleep when we have to, but not to develop a lifestyle of this.

God was even helping us when He said, *“It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late...”*. Vain is defined as that which produces no result; useless. To refuse the gift of God’s sleep is to have a following day where we are non-productive. We can actually get more done and done well by going to bed early or if we must stay up late, then stay in bed until the rest is received. Please understand we are not talking about sloth. God did not push for going to bed early and staying in bed late, but either going to bed early and getting up early or if we must stay up late, stay resting for the same duration if possible.

2. Let the activity be conducive to sleep, just before you lay down.

I am going to tell on myself. I often speak in the evening. Whenever I speak, I try not to do so on an overly filled stomach. So when I get through preaching, normally I am starved! After the service, I am most tempted to pig-out. When I was younger my metabolism was a bit heartier and could withstand the onslaught of rich food before I lay down. Now when I do this, I often suffer the consequences that lead to sleeplessness. Is it not agonizing to lie in bed knowing you need sleep, but are unable to take advantage of a nice bed, good pillow and the time allotted for obtaining this boon?

In my youth I used to be able to manage playing a tennis match late at night, then going to sleep. If too strenuous an activity takes place just before lying down, sleep often escapes you. Therefore, if we need a good night’s rest, let the activity be gentler and kinder to your body. The wise man said, *“Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser...”* (Proverbs 9:9).

3. Keep a restful atmosphere in the room you are trying to sleep.

I cannot sleep well if the television is on. I will hang on every word of the latest news, even when it is un-newsworthy. I like to go to sleep with soft music in the background. My wife likes to go to sleep with a book reading or news. If my wife, who is a musician, is hearing music, she will lie there analyzing every note. Not me! I am in the zone before Mozart has finished his piece. On the other hand, if we are listening to a Civil War documentary, I am intensely listening and my wife is asleep before the first commercial. Through the years we have learned to compromise, if we both get some sleep.

So keep the lights down, keep a good sleeping temperature in the room, keep the noise down and go for the blessing of sleep! *“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God”* (Hebrews 4:9).

4. Do not fill your mind with worry material.

This is where I often have a problem. I lie down and begin to think about people I love and the things they are going through and then the tossing and turning begins. Also, when I get preoccupied with things I must get done by the next day, I have a tendency to rob myself of precious sleep. Did not our Lord teach us, *“Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof”*

(Matthew 6:34). Our Lord was saying, tomorrow will have enough problems; don't add to those problems by your worrying!

5. Place good thought food in your mind before lying down.

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (Isaiah 26:3). I have found that healthy doses of the Word of God eliminate worry. Also if we focus our thoughts on Jesus, this is a great stress reliever, *“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds”* (Hebrews 12:3). Knowing that our Heavenly Father is watching over us is activating trust and helping us to enter into the rest God has for us. Jesus said, *“Be not ye therefore like unto them (the unbelieving heathen): for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him”* (Matthew 6:8).

6. Give God the thanks and the glory for a good night's rest!

The Bible says, *“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God”* (I Corinthians 10:31). I think it is appropriate to add sleep in that list of things to give God glory for. It is a simple, yet beautiful gift God has given us. I have asked Him to forgive me for not taking as much advantage of this blessing, but although I am a recent convert, I am determined to catch up! So, good night and sweet dreams!

-Pastor Pope-