

## **HEALTH & WHOLENESS**

### **“INSOMNIA: TIPS FOR GOOD SLEEP”**

I heard about two people that were talking together. One of them asked the other, “How late do you usually sleep on Sunday morning?” “It all depends,” he replied. “Depends on what?” “The length of the preacher’s sermon,” he said.

Two fellows were leaving church one Sunday and one confided to the other that he was suffering from insomnia. His friend said he had absolutely no problem whatsoever getting to sleep and getting a good night’s rest. “Really,” replied the first fellow. “What do you do? Count sheep?” “No,” he said. “I talk to the shepherd.”

We continue our series on health and wholeness. And one of the requirements of good health is good rest or adequate sleep. Most of us know what it is like to not get enough sleep. On Tuesday mornings about 30-40 teenagers get up extra early to go to a Breakfast Club we sponsor at Chik-Fil-A each week before school. They all receive a slip of paper where they write down prayer requests. These kids are great about praying for all kinds of needs of people in their sphere of influence and even around the world. But they also include prayer requests for themselves. And one of the personal prayer requests I hear probably more than any other is prayer for more sleep!

Lack of sleep has consequences. It’s not just a matter of feeling tired. It takes a huge toll on us. In January of 1959 a disc jockey named Peter Trip staged a wake-a-thon in Times Square in New York City. He did it as a benefit for the March of Dimes. He attempted to stay awake for two hundred hours. There were doctors attending to him along the way. But Trip had to fight hard to stay awake from the very beginning. After two days he began to hallucinate. He began seeing cobwebs in his shoes and his doctor’s coat looked to him like it was covered with worms. After one hundred hours he could no longer remember his phone number or address. He saw all kinds of things that were all imagined. When he was given a simple math problem, he found that he had to use super effort and time to figure it out. He simply couldn’t concentrate. At this point he broke down weeping. He was scared and emotionally drained. Finally after 170 hours of staying awake it was almost unbearable to watch him. He didn’t know who he was. He would look at his driver’s license and just shake his head. The doctors said that though he appeared to be awake, his brain was in a psychotic delusion.

Seems crazy doesn’t it? But it illustrates a point. It reminds us of how important this thing called sleep is to our mental and emotional and even physical well-being. We live in a world that doesn’t always value sleep. We somehow believe we have too much to do to take the time for sleep. We had an exchange student from Spain that lived with us a few years ago. She was about 16 or 17 at the time. She loved to stay up late at night, or should I say, until the wee hours of the morning. She loved to say, “I have too much to do. There is too much fun to have. I can sleep after I die.”

There is a strong work ethic that prevails in our country. Many of us have been raised to believe that if a person doesn’t produce, they are not valuable. Value is

sometimes connected to productivity. We believe we have to get all these things done and that somehow there just aren't enough hours in the day to get them done. Sometimes we have this idea that we are simply indispensable. If we don't do it, it won't get done. And it just absolutely has to get done and we have to do it, right?

A pastor I know was about to go on a two-week stretch of important engagements, speaking and teaching. He was to be the keynote speaker at a large gathering and had a very rigorous tour schedule he had committed to and prepared for long in advance. But he began to get sick as the time approached. Just before he was to leave he was very sick and he went to his doctor and requested that he give him something quickly to make him well so he could meet his obligation. "Just give me something quick, Doc, strong enough to make me well. I have to make this trip." The doctor checked him out and said he was sorry but he wasn't going anywhere. "You have double pneumonia in both lungs." "No, doctor, you don't understand. I have to make this trip. There is no way I can get out of it. They are counting on me." "No, you don't understand," replied the doctor. "You make the trip and you die." You stay at home and go to bed and rest, and maybe you get well and live."

The pastor reluctantly gave in. He had his wife call all the speaking engagements he had and cancelled them. For two weeks he stayed in bed and rested and regained his strength. He called the places he was to have spoken at, to check in with them and apologize. And one after the other replied, "Oh don't worry. We found someone else at the last minute and it worked out really well. They were great and God really moved. It was a great experience of ministry." "It was?" replied the pastor. "You mean God ministered without me? All that happened without me?" It was a great awakening! Maybe we are not indispensable.

Forty million Americans suffer from sleeplessness. What is the root of sleeplessness? Sometimes it is our own fault. We have a mistaken idea that we have too much to do to take time for sleep.

But sleep is God's idea. God could easily have created life in such a way that it is all one long day until we die. But he didn't. He created our world in such a way that it is divided into 24 hour periods, with daytime and nighttime. We have evening, rest, morning, the rising of the sun, and then a new day. Twenty-four hours and then there is a new cycle. And he created us in such a way that our bodies need time to shut down and rest and heal.

Let's look at what the Bible says about sleep. "*The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep,*" (Ecclesiastes 5:12-NIV). What Solomon is describing here is that sleep is a gift for the one that labors. It is sweet. It is pleasant. Unfortunately, for the one who has so many possessions in his or her life that they stay constantly worried over their wealth or abundance, they are not able to sleep and rest properly.

Or listen to this verse: *“The fear of the Lord leads to life, so that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil,”* (Proverbs 19:23, NASB). God gave sleep to us to be satisfying. Fear of the Lord means honoring the Lord. When we honor Him, respect Him, and keep our lives in a right relationship with Him, he gives us sleep that is satisfying; he gives us sleep as a gift.

David governed a whole nation. He led his armies into battle. He had a lot of responsibility on his shoulders and many things to worry about: nations that wanted to destroy him, individuals within his own nation that plotted against him. Even in the midst of everything going on in his life and in the midst of a particular battle in war, listen to what he says: *“I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety,”* (Psalm 4:8, NRSV).

Here are *three reasons* God has given us sleep. One, it is part of God’s plan to remind us that **we are not super-human**. We are not indispensable. And we are not so strong that we can do anything and everything in our own strength. Listen to God’s commandment regarding the Sabbath and rest. *“It is to be a Sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall humble your souls...from evening until evening you shall keep your Sabbath,”* (Leviticus 23:32, NASB). Did you hear that? Humble your soul! What does that mean? God is saying that even though there may yet be much more to do, it will still be there tomorrow. And the work will never be completely done, will it? Even in the midst of our work, we have to cease and desist. We have to stop and turn out the light and sleep. We are not indispensable. We are not super-human.

Secondly, God gives us sleep because **it is another chance to start over**. We got a Wii game for Christmas. Both of our kids and our nieces have played with me in several of the games. Most of the time, by the time we have played a few games they are so far ahead of me in score, it is pretty embarrassing. And then they will usually say, “Let’s just start all over.” Isn’t that a great idea when you are really behind? Starting over is a gift of grace. It’s also what the gift of sleep is. Sleep is the offer of a new beginning. When we have had a tough day, it is wise to remember that tomorrow will be a brand new day with a new beginning. So many times I have discovered that if I just wait until tomorrow and not try to make a decision without proper time to think about something and sleep on it, I make a wrong decision.

Listen to what the Bible says about the effect of a night: *“Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning,”* (Psalm 30:5, NASB). Every morning when I wake up, I have a wonderful prayer time. And usually I will pray something like this, “Lord thank you for the gift of rest last night and the gift of this new day. Help me to use it wisely. Help me to love and serve others as you love me. I consecrate this day to you.” It is a fresh commitment and consecration. But it is also recognition that I have a brand new day and brand new opportunities; opportunities to start over. Yesterday is over. It is a new day filled with God’s love and grace. Mistakes from yesterday are forgiven and forgotten.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote this piece of advice to his daughter after she had gone through a sour relationship breakup: *“Live each day fully; but then be done with it. Oh surely, there may have been some blunders, some mistakes and some mishaps. But leave that in yesterday. Whatever happened yesterday stays in yesterday. Don’t spoil the glorious potentials of today with the sorrows of yesterday. Start afresh with each rising of the sun.”*

With each new day God gives us a brand new chance to start over. But it is possible because of the renewal of a night of rest and sleep. We awake refreshed and renewed. Someone said that it is the space between the notes that really makes the music. Rest and sleep is like that too.

And thirdly, God gives us sleep because **it is a time to heal**. Our bodies repair themselves while we sleep. If you don’t get proper sleep, you operate with unhealed wounds. You carry over anxiety to the next day. You will be short with others, impatient, tense. You are affected adversely, physically, emotionally and mentally if you don’t get adequate rest and sleep. Listen to this verse from Malachi: *“But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip like calves from the stall,”* (Malachi 4:2, NASB). Can you picture that? Calves going forth from the stall skipping and jumping with delight! I checked several different translations and all of them had the words, “sun of righteousness” written with a “u.” “SUN.” The s-u-n of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. With good sleep you will rise and go free and skip like a calf, healed and made whole.

So how do we get good sleep? We know how to get longer sleep. Go to bed earlier. But sometimes we have trouble sleeping, don’t we? Here are some things that work for me. I know that I can’t eat supper too late. One night recently I came in at 8:30 and hadn’t eaten supper. I was pretty hungry and ate a pretty decent size meal. Bedtime came and I was wide-awake. My body was still working digesting. It couldn’t shut down. I know I can’t drink caffeine at night or too much sugar for the obvious reasons. But beyond these obvious practical things, what can we do to rest properly?

One, **learn to forgive and forget**. So many times we lay awake at night simmering and stewing over something someone has done to us. One day a pastor encountered a woman in his church who constantly talked about her dialogues and conversations with God as if it happened every morning over tea. She would come in and say, “Oh pastor, I was talking to the Lord this morning. We were talking about this and that. Oh, we just had a wonderful conversation.” This would happen every time he saw her. One day he asked her what she talked to the Lord about. “Oh we talked about you.” He was starting to grow a little weary with this. “You really talk to God in a conversation?” he asked. “Oh, yes!” “Well, I’ll tell you what. The next time you talk to God, ask God what he thinks about what I did back in college.” That was all he said. You see, he had actually done some things back in college he was very ashamed of. He had confessed these sins to God and knew God had forgiven him. But he still remembered them and still carried the weight of the sins. The next time he saw her he asked her, “Well, did you talk to God this morning?” “Oh, yes. We had a wonderful dialogue. God

is just so good.” “Did you remember to ask him about what he thought about what I did in college?” “Oh, yes. I mentioned that to him.” “And what did God say?” “Oh, when I asked him about that, God said that He can’t remember. He can’t remember.”

That is what God is like. When we ask him to forgive us, not only does he forgive, but he also forgets it. He forgives **and** forgets. It has to be the same way for us. If we are going to be people of rest, then we have to let things go. We have to drop them. It never matters whether the person deserves it or not. You can’t let your mind dwell on it or continue to go back to something. Give it to God. Let it go. Ask God to help you let it go.

God says, “*I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins,*” (Isaiah 43:25).

And finally, **learn to rest fully**. Jesus said, “*Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light,*” (Matthew 11:28-30, NASB).

Sometimes our weariness is not physical. The problem is there just isn’t any rest for our souls. There is only one way to find real rest. Rest and sleep is a gift from God. We can sleep, but if we haven’t come to him, there still may not be real rest for our souls. Sometimes that is the reason for the anxiety and struggles we are facing. Maybe you are getting seven or eight hours of sleep. But you are still weary. Your soul is weary. The soul is not at rest. When we come to Christ we give him our hearts; hearts that are full of brokenness, mistakes and wounds. Then he is able to give us his heart. When we give him our hearts and he gives us his heart, or he gives us a brand new heart, little by little things become different. He changes us. And he sets us free. And he gives us rest. Real rest. Rest for our souls. “*Come to me all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest... You will find rest for your souls.*”

You can’t give him part of your heart. You can’t give him part of your faith and your trust. You have to give it all to him. The only way we will find real peace and rest is when we completely turn it all over to him. I invite you this morning to turn everything over to the One who is the Lord of the Sabbath, the Lord of peace, the Lord of rest.

If you would like to come to the altar to pray for anything, you are invited to come now. If you would like someone to pray for you, simply turn your palms up and that will let someone know you would like for them to pray for you. You can tell them what your prayer request is or you can simply say you have an unspoken request.

I invite you to come to the altar now if you would like while I lead us in a prayer for rest. Music will be play as we begin singing softly.

Lord, you are the giver of rest and sleep. We thank you for the gift of sleep. We thank you for its healing power. We realize how much we need you in every area of our lives.

Thank you for your desire for us to be whole and healthy. Show us what we need to do to experience rest in our lives. Show us how we can better discipline ourselves in this area, or how we need to turn things over to you. Come into our lives. We want you to be Lord over our lives. Give us brand new hearts. Give us new minds. Set us free from our sins. Help us to forgive and forget as you forgive us and forget all our sins. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.