

Day 3

The Gift of Sleep

If exercise is one of the most spiritual ways to steward your body, accepting God's gift of sleep may be even more so. God designed us to be productive through work and rejuvenated through sleep.

It's startling, almost comical that someone who makes it to sixty years has spent twenty of them in bed. God designed us to need sleep. Like a battery that must be recharged, our bodies need daily renewal.

Sleep is a continual reminder that God is God and we are not. It's his call, in the calming words of Psalm 46:10, to *"Be still and know that I am God."* It is a loving invitation to cease fretting and realize that God is sovereign; that he is in control of the universe, even when we are safely tucked up in bed.

I wish I had taken more notice of Psalm 127:2 when I was in my twenties and thirties: *"In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves."* In that chapter of life, sleep seemed like an interruption in the things I believed God wanted me to achieve. I burned out in my late thirties and believe the cumulative effect of neglecting adequate sleep was a contributing factor. Overworking and "under sleeping" was *"in vain"*—in other words pointless—because sleep is one of God's gifts of love.

It was as if I were pushing God's gift to one side by anxiously working 'to the bone'. Thankfully, since then I've sought (imperfectly) to accept sleep as his gift of grace.

For some of us though, this divine gift seems to slip out of our grasp. Sleep eludes us, or we fall asleep easily, then wake for ages, in the small hours. How can we handle restless nights? I've certainly proved that trying harder to sleep is counterproductive. There is no quick fix for insomnia. I have found that Psalm 55:22 helps me to release the stress of sleeplessness: *Cast your burdens on the LORD, and he will sustain you.* It's a call to turn my cares into prayers. Release them—hand them over to God one by one, and try not to take them back!

If sleep eludes you from time to time, you're in good company. The godly psalmist makes this confession: *"I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word. My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises."* (Psalm 119:148-149) He asks God for help with this and trustfully takes the opportunity to rest on God's promises.

The goal is not perfect sleep, but trusting God whether sleep comes easily or not.

Exercise and sleep are an interesting pair.

Exercise is active stewardship; sleep is passive stewardship.

Exercise says, "I will do what I can with the body God has given me."

Sleep says, "I will trust God with what I cannot do."

Scripture frequently uses sleep as a metaphor for death—not because the two are identical, but because both imply trustfully lying down and rising again by God's power.

Each morning, we awaken to a new day. In a small way, sleep reminds us of the greater awakening still to come. Speaking of the sleep of death, Paul could say, *"Listen, I show you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed."* (1 Corinthians 15:51).

As age advances and mortality becomes more visible, sleep reminds believers in Christ of our ultimate hope in him.

Sleep then, is God's nightly invitation to surrender control, and rest in his loving care. It reminds us that we are finite, dependent, and deeply loved. Each night we entrust ourselves to the God who never sleeps, and each morning we wake to fresh mercies and a foretaste of resurrection still to come.

Join with David tonight and say:

"In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone LORD, make me to dwell in safety. (Psalm 4:8).

Reflect & Discuss:

1. How do you normally view sleep—as an interruption to your work, or as one of God's gifts of grace? Why?
2. What worries, responsibilities, or unfinished tasks most often keep you awake at night? How might you practically "cast your burdens on the Lord" this week?
3. Is there one simple habit that could help you receive God's gift of sleep more gratefully and consistently?
4. In what way does the daily rhythm of lying down and rising again point you to your future hope in Christ?

Prayer:

Father, help me to receive sleep as your gift and trust you with all that I cannot control. Amen.

Scriptures for Further Meditation

- Psalm 4:3-8
- Psalm 121:1-8
- 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

