

Adventuring with God

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Sleep Stealers

It's funny how things change. When I was young and had small children at home, I would run myself ragged all day and fall into bed half dead when night rolled around. Falling to sleep was never a problem. At that time in my life, I always felt like I didn't get enough sleep, but I likely did. It's just that I enjoyed it so much, I wanted more!

Now that I'm older, and all my kids are out of the house, I find good sleep patterns hard to find and maintain. Probably there are a lot of reasons for that—age being one of them. As people get older, sleep challenges just seem to come with the territory. I also get less exercise than I used to. Most of my workday is spent in front of a computer, seated. This sedentary lifestyle contributes to more bodily aches and pains, and they can also rob me of restful sleep.

Last—but certainly not least—in this list of “sleep stealers” is more and more “cares of this life” that weigh upon the mind and refuse to be turned off the moment your head hits the pillow. As families grow and responsibilities increase, people of any age can struggle with this sleep challenge. There's nothing more frustrating than being physically exhausted but being wide awake mentally. How do you turn off the chatter in your brain?

In the midst of working through these various sleep challenges, I'm starting to take comfort in scriptures I never noticed before: *“He grants sleep to those he loves”* (Psalm 127:2). *“When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet”* (Proverbs 3:24).

“My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (Exodus 33:14). I know that “rest” in Scripture doesn't always mean physical sleep, but it's still a comfort to know that His presence is with me in the middle of the night when I'm awake!

Since my faith in God impacts every area of my life, I've considered the spiritual implications of this rather common human problem. What can I learn from it? How can I handle it using the resources available to me in Christ Jesus? I've often thought about poor David, running for his life from King Saul and having to bed down in rock caves and other dens. It's pretty hard to enjoy restful sleep when you know your enemy is in hot pursuit and means to kill you when he finds you! If I am having trouble sleeping in my bed with a pillow-top mattress and clean sheets, I can't imagine how hard it would be to get comfortable with only a rock for a pillow.

Yet, David *did* learn how to sleep in his circumstances and here's how he did it—by reminding himself of the One who watched over him and took responsibility for keeping him from harm: *“I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety”* (Psalm 4:8).

In my situation (which is obviously very different from David's) I've learned this lesson too. I've learned to trust God to meet my needs and supply day by day the strength that I don't have. I've made Him my source of supply, and He has never let me

down. My human reasoning would tell me that I can't put in a full day of very detailed and mentally stressful work with just a couple of hours of sleep. Yet, time and again I have done it. It serves as a very practical object lesson for me to see God's sufficiency in *every* situation I might face.

He knows my limitations, and He supplies me with the make-up sleep I require. Obviously, I don't face these restless nights for any extended period of time. But it has been good for me to see His faithful care over me when in my flesh I'm tempted to give in to fear or anger or frustration. Now I've learned to pray, "Lord, give me what I need for this night and for what I will face tomorrow. I trust you to be my supply, and I won't let Satan overwhelm me with the 'What ifs' of this sleepless night. I know you are my loving Father. Thank you for faithfully supplying my every need."

Sleep problems have taught me other lessons, too. I've had to face the temptation of worry and learn how God would have me deal with it. When I'm lying awake at night because I'm trying to figure out situations *before* they come, or I'm thinking through how to make someone I love safer or more comfortable, I have to face facts. I'm acting contrary to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6: *"Do not worry about your life ... Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ... Your heavenly Father knows [what] you need. ... Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will*

worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (v. 25, 27, 32, 34).

Jesus' solution to this sleep stealer is simple: Trust the One who has control over all things. I can't turn off my loving concern for others—that is something tied up in the experience of being human. But what I *can* learn to do is to invite God to bear the concerns with me and let Him carry the responsibilities for what happens. My role is to commit my concerns to Him in prayer and then quit worrying about them. *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:6-7).

This passage in Philippians may be very familiar, and we may feel we "know it" well, but the truth is, all of us find it very hard to put into practice. We need to be reminded often of the fact that we are (thankfully) not in control of life's circumstances. Our only hope for peace and rest is to trust the One who *is*. The great preacher Charles Spurgeon illustrated it in this way: "You are aboard such a large ship that you would be unable to steer even if your Captain placed you at the helm. You would not even be able to adjust the sails, yet you worry as if you were the captain or the helmsman of the vessel. Be quiet, dear soul—God is the Master."

Tonight, my soul, be still and sleep;
The storms are raging on God's deep—
God's deep, not yours, be still and sleep.

Tonight, my soul, be still and sleep;
God's hands will still the Tempter's sweep—
God's hands, not yours, be still and sleep.

If I am to find the restful sleep I seek, I will need to learn all these lessons. I can't do anything about getting older, but I can develop a deeper trust in God for those times when my age robs me of sleep.

Tonight, my soul, be still and sleep;
God's love is strong while night hours creep—
God's love, not yours, be still and sleep.

Tonight, my soul, be still and sleep;
God's heaven will comfort those who weep—
God's heaven, not yours, be still and sleep.
(from L.B. Cowman's book *Streams in the Desert*)

God can take care of those times and supply what I need to carry on. Some sleep stealers, however, are controllable. I can take better care of my body, and I can tackle the tendency towards worry. If I can

make use of all the resources available to me
through Christ, I will be able to be still and sleep,

finding in God the “sweet sleep” He promises to
those He loves.

“He Hideth My Soul”

A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord, a wonderful Savior to me;
He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock, where rivers of pleasure I see.

*He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock that shadows a dry, thirsty land;
He hideth my life in the depths of His love, and covers me there with His hand,
And covers me there with His hand.*

A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord, He taketh my burden away;
He holdeth me up, and I shall not be moved, He giveth me strength as my day.

With numberless blessings each moment He crowns, and filled with His fullness divine,
I sing in my rapture, “O glory to God for such a Redeemer as mine!”

By Fanny Crosby (1890)