

Connecting With God For a Strong Finish

So we'll be Ready when the Time Comes

PART 2

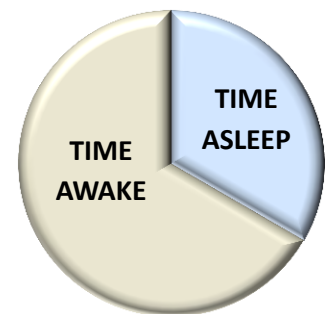
How to Connect with God for Strength

CHAPTER 4

Rest for Strength

Sleep—A Love Gift from God

During a typical lifetime, each person average about 8 hours of sleep each night. That equates to about one-third of our lifespan or 30 years of sleep for every 90 years of life. That's a big chunk of time. It emphasizes the importance of sleeping.



God organized our solar system with recurring periods of light and darkness to facilitate sleep. He designed everyone without exception, to participate in this daily rhythm. Sleep-wake cycles are more than a biological instinct—they accommodate a special love-gift from God. He gives sleep to those He loves.

*It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; For so **He gives His beloved sleep.** (Psalm 127:2 NKJ)*

In “The Treasury of David”, Charles Spurgeon quotes Henry Melville, a 19th Century Canon at St. Paul’s Cathedral and a priest in the Church of England:

The world would give its favourites power, wealth, distinction; God gives “sleep”. Could He give anything better? To give sleep when the storm is raging; to give sleep when evil angels are trying to

overturn our confidence in Christ; to give sleep when death is approaching, when judgment is at hand—Oh! what gift could be more suitable? what more worthy of God? or what more precious to the soul?¹

Our greatest need in this life is not enhancing our performance or increasing our productivity. Connecting with God is paramount, whether we are awake or asleep.

Affirming Psalm 127:2 from the NAS rendition, (i.e., “**He gives to His beloved even in his sleep**”), Charles Spurgeon makes the following observations concerning this divinely scheduled love gift:

Through faith the Lord makes his chosen ones to rest in him in happy freedom from care. The text may mean that God gives blessings to his beloved in sleep, even as he gave Solomon the desire of his heart while he slept. The meaning is much the same: those whom the Lord loves are delivered from the fret and fume of life, and take a sweet repose upon the bosom of their Lord. He rests them; blesses them while resting; blesses them more in resting than others in their moiling and toiling. God is sure to give the best thing to his beloved, and we here see that he gives them sleep—that is a laying aside of care, a forgetfulness of need, a quiet leaving of matters with God; this kind of sleep is better than riches and honor.²

Spurgeon points out that Jesus slept soundly during a violent storm at sea perhaps because He felt secure “in his Father's hand, and therefore he was so quiet in spirit that the billows rocked him to sleep.”³ Again quoting Melville, Spurgeon highlights God’s deliberate connection as we sleep:

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (Mclean, VA: MacDonald Publishing), vol. 3: p. 91.

² C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, (Mclean, VA: MacDonald Publishing), vol. 3: pp. 84-85.

³ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, (Mclean, VA: MacDonald Publishing), vol. 3: pp. 85.

It is not “he sendeth his beloved sleep,” which might be true whilst God himself remained at a distance; it is “He giveth His beloved sleep”; as though God himself brought the sleep, and laid it on the eyes of the weary Christian warrior.⁴

Sweet Sleep satisfies the Soul

Sleep promises to be “*sweet*” and “*satisfying*” if we prime this experience by applying several principles:

- Preserve sound judgment (wisdom)
- Uphold discernment
- Refuse unnecessary fear
- Maintain the fear of the Lord with reverence and awe

*My son, **preserve sound judgment** [or **wisdom**, NKJ] and **discernment**, do not let them out of your sight; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble; when you lie down, **you will not be afraid**; when you lie down, **your sleep will be sweet**. (Proverbs 3:21-24 NIV)*

***The fear of the LORD leads to life, so that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil.** (Proverbs 19:23 NAS)*

Sleeping in God’s presence allows times of refreshing to renew our strength and restore our mind. He enriches our soul with lasting value whether we consciously remember the details from our divine encounters or not.

According to Spurgeon:

Because the Lord is mainly to be rested in, all carking care is mere vanity and vexation of spirit.... Some deny themselves needful rest; the morning sees them rise before they are rested, the evening sees them toiling long after the curfew has tolled the knell of part-

⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing), vol. 3: p. 91.

ing day. They threaten to bring themselves into the sleep of death by neglect of the sleep, which refreshes life.⁵

Insomnia

When sleep evades our resolve, God capitalizes on the moment. He invites us to draw near for another purpose. Perhaps to:

- Confer a message while we are still conscious
- Alert us to pray for a person, group, or situation
- Cleanse our heart from toxic debris such as anger, fear, bitterness, resentment, strife, and/or anxiety

Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, (Eph 4:26 NIV)

- Encounter us in a wrestling match, similar to Jacob's tussle
 - So we might contend for a blessing, grappling in faith and striving in hope
 - So we might plead for enhanced virtue or for an improved identity
 - So we might gain timely wisdom and revelation to better appreciate God's character, commitment, and competence

So **Jacob** was left alone, and a man **wrestled** with him **till daybreak**.²⁵ When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.²⁶ Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you **bless me**."²⁷ The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered.²⁸ Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but **Israel**, because **you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome**."²⁹ Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then **he blessed him there**.

⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (Mclean, VA: MacDonald Publishing), vol. 3: pp. 84.

³⁰So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because **I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.**” (Gen 32:24-30 NIV)

When sleep evades us, God imparts special grace and peace. He greets our racing mind with calculated favor so we might show mercy to others, withdrawing critical verdicts and callous judgments. Tension and worry vanish when God illuminates the future with faith, infuses our perspective with hope, and immerses our heart in love.

Clarifying our Motive

On one of the most decisive nights in history, Jesus implored three disciples to act like insomniacs. They fell asleep nonetheless. Waking them with a thought provoking question, He chastised them for dozing when they should have been praying.

*When he [Jesus] rose from prayer [in preparation for crucifixion] and went back to the disciples, he **found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow.** “**Why are you sleeping?**” he asked them. “**Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.**” (Luke 22:45-46 NIV)*

Jesus found Peter, James, and John sleeping while He agonized in prayer, “*overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*”.⁶ Three of His most devoted disciples allowed weakness in the flesh to dominate their willing spirit.⁷ They slept at the wrong time and for the wrong reason, perhaps because they underestimated the pivotal nature of this moment.

Sorrow-bred fatigue heightens our vulnerability. It lures harmful dynamics apart from Jesus. Sleep involves a unique risk since we lie exposed to adversarial perils. Satan seeks to steal, kill, and destroy us whether we are awake or asleep. Connecting with God through prayer activates vital safeguards before we encounter temptations from the night. Since unconscious slumber diminishes our guard, we should be

⁶ Mark 14:34

⁷ Matthew 26:41

especially proactive—remaining on high alert when weariness and grief converge. Sleeping pills, alcohol, drugs, and hypnotics offer risky substitutes for the satisfying sleep that God gives.

Priorities beyond Sleep

Establishing God’s presence upon the throne of our heart takes precedence over routine bed rest. David wrote:

*Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, Or go up to the comfort of my bed; **I will not give sleep to my eyes Or slumber to my eyelids, Until I find a place for the LORD, A dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.*** (Psalms 132:3-5 NKJ)

When we address the primary longing of our heart, God responds with passionate favor. Isaiah wrote:

*My soul yearns **for you** in the night; in the morning my spirit longs **for you...*** (Isa 26:9 NIV)

*With my soul **I have desired You** in the night, Yes, by my spirit within me **I will seek You** early...* (Isa 26:9 NKJ)

While we sleep, God offers enlightening benefits:

- He opens our spiritual ears to hear His voice
- He seals vital instruction with strong feelings
- He warns us to avoid wrongdoing
- He prevents us from pride

*Indeed God speaks once, or twice, yet no one notices it. **In a dream, a vision of the night, when sound sleep falls on men, while they slumber in their beds, then He opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction** [NIV uses “terrify them with warnings”], **that He may turn man aside from his conduct** [NIV uses from “wrongdoing”], **and keep man from pride; He keeps back his soul from the pit, and his life from passing over into Sheol.*** (Job 33:14-18 NAS)

With distractions minimized, David recognized the convenient advantage of a nightly repose.

*I will praise the LORD, who **counsels me**; even at night my heart **instructs me**.* (Psalms 16:7 NIV)

Essential Sleep

In 1964, 16-year-old Randy Gardner established a medically monitored record for voluntarily sleep-deprivation (11 days and 24 minutes). Afterward, the Guinness Book of World Records discontinued this competition for the protection of its contenders. After 8-10 sleepless nights, staying awake requires a strong deterrent. The consequences associated with sleep deprivation are not well understood. Ancient Rome however, used the “Tormentum vigiliae, or waking torture, to slowly kill their prisoners.”⁸ The ultimate punishment for those who worship the beast and its image, or receive the mark of its name, will be eternal torment day and night without rest.⁹

In “Your Body Clock”, Hubertus Strughold points out that extended sleep deprivation may result in brain damage due to the degeneration of ganglion nerve cells outside the brain or spinal cord. He states:

“Within the time frame of 24 hours man needs a certain quantity of sleep for energy restoration and revitalization. This must be regarded as a biological law. To break this law by ignoring sleep for 60 to 80 hours leads to extreme fatigue, lapse of attention, irritability, deterioration of performance capability, and finally to visual disturbances and hallucinations.”¹⁰

No one sustains life, health, and strength without satisfying this fundamental need—sleep is vital and it’s irresistible. According to Kenneth Rose, “The fact that it invades our lives so thoroughly attests to sleep’s power and to its importance.”¹¹

⁸ Kenneth Jon Rose, *The Body in Time*, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1988), pp. 90-91.

⁹ Revelation 14:11

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

¹¹ Rose, *The Body in Time*, p. 97.

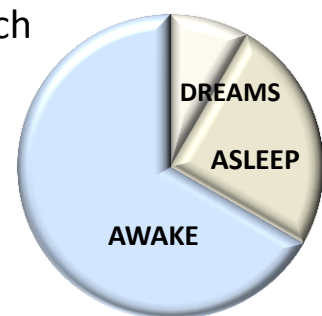
While some boast how they get by on little sleep, research shows that most adults require about eight hours of sleep per night to function at a premium. From experience, counselors at the Minirth-Meier Clinic note that insomniacs tend to be more irritable, critical, depressed, have a harder time concentrating, work less efficiently, and enjoy life less.¹²

Different persons, under different circumstances, require different amounts of sleep. The need for sleep changes with age, activity, circumstances, health, and conditioning. For instance, infants and children require more sleep than adults do. Occupied with conquest, Napoleon Bonaparte allowed himself no more than four hours of sleep while Albert Einstein spent ten hours in bed grappling with theoretical physics.

Dreams Inject a Wealthy Bonus

Orthodox Sleep involves discrete cycles alternating between light, deep, and paradoxical. Paradoxical Sleep includes dreams characterized by rapid eye-motion (REM). Sleep does not shutdown the brain. According to Rose, it is far from being dormant since “a sleeping brain is busy and animated.”¹³

Adults normally dream nearly two hours each night.¹⁴ Most dreams escape our memory before fully awakening. Nonetheless, we spend approximately 8% or 1/12th of our life dreaming. During this time, God may communicate with us directly or through angels.



The following biblical characters connected with God during captivating dreams. Many received lifesaving counsel, warnings, or explicit instruction: Abimelech, Jacob, Laban, Joseph, Pharaoh's cupbearer and

¹² Minirth, How to Beat Burnout, p. 105.

¹³ Rose, The Body in Time, p. 91.

¹⁴ Rose, The Body in Time, p. 96.

baker, a Midianite, and Solomon. During a night vision, God revealed Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation to Daniel, saving him and the Kings advisors from execution. After finding Jesus, a dream warned the Magi to avoid King Herod. God gave Joseph the husband of Mary vital lifesaving direction during a dream. Paul had a night vision (perhaps a dream) urging him to bring help to the Macedonians.

Biological Aspects of Sleep

God designed living organisms to function on a 24-hour cycle referred to as a circadian rhythm. Based on earth's rotation around its axis, this rhythm regulates predictable sleep-wake cycles.¹⁵

Located at the base of the brain, the hypothalamus operates as a master clock; lesions in this area cause insomnia. This internal pacemaker regulates the body with natural precision. Synchronized with light-dark rotations, the suprachiasmatic nucleus (part of the hypothalamus) is the core of our body clock. It coordinates bodily functions with the circadian rhythm.

The pineal gland in the middle of the brain makes melatonin, a potent hormone responsible for influencing the suprachiasmatic nucleus to induce sleep. Darkness triggers the pineal gland to stimulate sleep; it secretes more melatonin at night than during the day.¹⁶ Exposure to bright light after sunset blocks melatonin production and therefore, interferes with sleep.

The reticular formation may be the most important controller of sleep. Several other parts of the brain seem to be involved along with tiny biological pocket watches within various organs (heart, lung, liver, kidneys, etc.), which appear to activate unique daily rhythms. The body generates numerous substances, which are yet to be understood. Besides melatonin, serotonin, prolactin, and prostaglandins also influence our sleep patterns.

¹⁵ Rose, *The Body in Time*, p. 91.

¹⁶ Rose, *The Body in Time*, pp. 91-92.

Exposure to bright light depletes vitamin A, which our body uses to rebuild specialized photoreceptor cells in the retina. Each night as we sleep, these cells regenerate. Periods of darkness are vital to our vision.¹⁷ When there is too much light and not enough vitamin A, irreversible vision loss occurs. The strength of our vision depends on periods of darkness so we can rebuild photoreceptor cells in our eyes.

Jesus said we are to do the works of the Father as long as it is day. He associates night metaphorically as a time when no one works.

*As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. **Night is coming, when no one can work** (John 9:4 NIV)*

Endeavoring to lengthen our day, we use artificial light to both increase productivity and promote over-exertion. In certain instances however, God endorsed around the clock activity. David appointed singers to praise God day and night in the house of the Lord.¹⁸ Before appointing twelve apostolic leaders, Jesus spent an entire night in prayer high on a mountain.¹⁹ On the other hand, Satan accuses believers day and night before God.²⁰

Prolonged Sleep Disruption may Increase the Risk of Breast Cancer

Scientific research shows that interrupting our natural sleep cycle may increase the risk of breast cancer, especially in women working the graveyard shift.

In a research study that investigated shiftwork and breast cancer, investigators found an 8% increase in breast cancer risk among nurses working rotating night shifts for up to 29 years. In women who had

¹⁷ Katz, Stientjes, Gao, and Norberg, Bright Environmental Light Accelerates Rhodopsin Depletion in Retinoid-Deprived Rats, Investigative Ophthalmology and Visual Science, 1993;34:2000-2008.

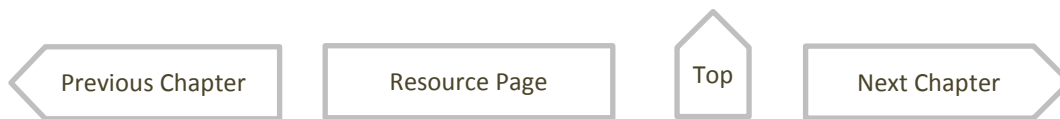
¹⁸ 1Chronicles 9:33 and Psalm 134:1

¹⁹ Luke 6:12

²⁰ Revelation 12:10

worked such shifts for more than 30 years, they report a 36% increase in breast cancer risk.²¹

Another study reported up to 60% increase risk of breast cancer. It also found a trend of increased risk with increasing years and with more hours per week of graveyard shift work.²² The more time women work in bright light at night, the greater their risk of breast cancer. According to Katherine Arnold, “it appears from these two studies that interrupting the natural production of melatonin during nighttime sleep is associated with an increased risk of breast cancer.”²³



²¹ Schernhammer, Eva, MD, PhD, Laden F, Seizer FE, Willett WC, Hunter DJ, Kawachi I, Colditz GA. Rotating night shifts and risk of breast cancer in women participating in the Nurses’ Health Study. *J Natl Cancer Inst* 2001;93:1563–8. Brigham and Women’s Hospital and Harvard Medical School

²² Davis Scott, PhD, Mirick DK, Stevens RG. Night shift work, light at night, and risk of breast cancer. *J Natl Cancer Inst* 2001;93:1557–62. Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Seattle

²³ Arnold, Katherine, Working Nights Associated With Increased Risk of Breast Cancer, *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* Vol. 93, No. 20, 1511, October 17, 2001© 2001 Oxford University Press.