

The God Who Doesn't Sleep

Trinity Church Golden Grove

By Luke Dahlenburg | December 31, 2023 | 1 Kings 19:1-9 and Psalm 127

Sleep is important to our wellbeing

In October 2023, [a study on sleep was done](#).

- 2 out of 5 Aussies struggle to get to sleep.
- 2 out of 3 Aussies said the amount of sleep they get, impacts their work performance.
- 4 in 5 say general stress, anxiety and financial worries keep them up at night.
- Parents, on average, say that it takes 64 minutes to put their 0-3 year old to sleep!

The things you do before bed impact your sleep too:

Screens, food, alcohol, caffeine, that one extra Netflix episode and the time you get to bed all determine how you sleep.

We all know sleep is really important.

Today, I want to put to you, not just the physical importance, but the God given importance of sleep. In fact, Sleep is something that can and should be done to the glory of God. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" [1 Corinthians 10:31](#).

Question is, how can we sleep to the glory of God?

Let me also qualify today's talk with 3 things, I'm **not** saying:

1. If you are a Christian you will always sleep well.
2. If you have more faith, you will sleep better.
3. If you aren't sleeping well, you aren't glorify God.

The aim of this talk is to give you a good theology of sleep, so that when you can't and seasons of sleeplessness come, You'll be able to find comfort and hope in your God who doesn't sleep. Which also means, if you find yourself in a prolonged periods of sleeplessness, Can I encourage you to chat with your GP about it? God chooses to use means such as food, sleep and medicine for the preservation of our health. You might need extra support to sleep, and that's okay.

Whatever your situation, May you know that Jesus redeems our vision of sleep, so that we don't do it alone and can sleep for his glory. Christianity is the invitation to trust and walk with God in all of life – even sleep. If you don't know the god who doesn't sleep – glad you are here. Maybe you'll consider what it means to do life and sleep with God today.

So then, how does a theology of sleep help us glorify God? Let's look at:

Four Psalms On Sleep

Psalm 127 – Sleep is a gift of love

God doesn't sleep, which means, when we sleep, it can't be a sign of imaging God. Like work is, or showing compassion or justice. Sleep is part of the God / creature relationship. We are dependant upon oxygen and food. God isn't. We need sleep. God doesn't. Sleep is something God made for us, which means, it's a gift from him.

And he gives it to those he loves. Look at verse 2: "In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat— for he grants sleep to those he loves." Of course, this doesn't mean if you can't sleep one night, God doesn't love you! God loves people, so he gives people sleep. Living a fallen and broken world means that sleep will also be less than perfect and far from God's intent at times.

The example here clues us in on one way. Sleep is not received as a gift, because we get too busy working. We don't receive the gift of sleep because we are too busy. In fact, in [Ecclesiastes 8:16](#) rich people can find it harder to sleep than others, because they are anxious about their stuff being lost while they sleep.

Is this not so many of us? Work demands and pressures mean impact our sleep – from the extra shift, to the never ending emails or the phone calls, work and sleep so often compete for our attention.

So, sleep is a gift of love, reminding us that we have no need to be anxious in our father's world and that we can work and rest in him, leaving the burden's of our day in his hands each night. Which means, sleep is a something to praise God for. To thank him for. Have you thanked God for sleep ?

Psalm 121 – God watches over us as we sleep

We read this in verse 4, "Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." Both slumber and sleep mean closing your eyes, being drowsy. When your are tired, you are more likely to make errors of judgment.

I remember dating Natasha and we stayed up really, really late one night. And the next day, I went off to work in I.T and I was running on about 2 hours of broken sleep. And so, like all 19 year olds do, I went to the local shop, and grabbed the breakfast of champions – two cans of Red Bull and a donut. And I remember this day so well. For about 5 second I felt amazing. Then a horrible sickness was with me all day And I was still drowsy.

Our God is not dependant on coffee or Red Bull's to stay awake. Sleep is a reminder that we are not God. He works tirelessly. He works day and night shift. He never feels weary. He watches over us, all day and night. We see this illustrated in [Mark 4:27](#). Jesus says that God continues to govern the world, like making seeds grow on a farm, while we sleep.

So, work well and then, go to sleep, knowing that you have no ability to keep the world going. But your God does. Take comfort in that. That he will not only watch over you as you sleep, but, as [Psalm 3](#) says:

Psalm 3 – God is with us as we sleep

Down in verse 5, “I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me.” Don’t think the author is on holidays when he says this. In verse 6 there are ten thousand people assailing him on every side.

Sleep can also be a scary thing. Abraham in [Genesis 15:12](#) had terrible nightmares when he slept once. How many children have dreams that frighten? Or, sleep brings up painful memoirs from the past? For this Psalmist there’s conflict and fear if he sleeps. Often, these fearful things keep us up and, they affect us the next day and our brains are like porridge.

Expect, this need not be a Christian. Sometimes the Godliest thing you can do is get a good nights sleep. And it comes by knowing that as we sleep, god is present and sustain us. Part of our spiritual habits should also include giving our bodies the sleep they need. Just because God doesn’t sleep, doesn’t mean we can power on, with 4 hours a night and imagine that we will be sharp, kind or productive the next day. Sleeping and waking is the normal, grace of God to all people to sustain us. And just as God is with us in the day, he is with us as we sleep.

Which, brings us the the last Psalm on sleep:

Psalm 4 – God gives the sweetest sleep

“In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.”

The word for peace is the Hebrew, Shalom. It’s used in [Isaiah 32:17-18](#) and carries a similar idea to [Psalm 4](#). Listen out for the word peace: “The Lord’s justice will dwell in the desert, his righteousness live in the fertile field. The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest.”

God’s peace is like a perfectly made wall, that has no gaps in the bricks. It’s wall of protection that is prefect and in a state of wholeness. Shalom is peace, order, wholeness and rest, that comes from God, when he restores us to himself.

Which is what’s happening in verse 8 of [Psalm 4](#).

God’s intent for humanity is to make us whole in him, so that in both our waking and in our sleeping, we will be at peace.

Of course, You say, Luke, I’m a Christian and I sleep badly! I brought a new pillow yesterday to help my sleep – it’s been bad most of this week. Why do I struggle? The completeness of shalom, isn’t here yet:

- Sickness,

- Stress,
- New Borns,
- Anxious thoughts,
- Work,

They will plague our sleep habits until God renews the heaven's and earth and until we put on our new bodies. If you never sleep well, you will one day have shalom rest.

At the birth of Jesus, the angel said peace was arriving in him, [Luke 1:79](#)

In his death, Jesus made peace between us and God, [Ephesians 2:14-15](#)

Because of Jesus, you have the guarantee that your big, never sleeping God, is watching over you, Whom you can cast your burdens on to each night, and who in him alone can bring about a peaceful sleep.

So, this is all very good. But, what does it look like to trust God with our sleep?

Let's look at two case studies of real people and real sleep.

Case Study: Elijah and the time he really needed a nap

In [1 Kings 18](#), Elijah had confronted false prophets of Baal with confidence and courage from his God. All that was 24 hours ago. In [1 Kings 19](#) we meet a different person He's broken, discouraged and fearful. In verse 10 Elijah bemoans that the people have still rejected God – even after such a big display of God's power. And in verse 2-3 he's afraid of Jezebel, who want to kill him.

So, he runs away, to meet God at the place Moses met God. He's astute enough to know where to find God, But, he's so broken, it's going to take a little time to get there – spiritually speaking.

Now, the thing I'm interested in, is that at this point, Elijah needs sleep, food and prayer to re-orientation him to God, to keep going. Those physical things are really important. So, after running for his life, he asks God to take his life, in verse 4, further showing what sort of place he's in. Next, he chooses to isolate himself from people. He goes into the wilderness. Seldom could someone be more alone. Elijah is not in a good state of mind. Even his prayer is from a place of desperation, dread and doom as he laments over life itself.

But notice this: In God's kindness, God doesn't say anything yet. Sometimes, we so long for God to answer us, that we can't see that God's silence isn't his absence, but his care. With that in mind, I'll read verse 5-6 now we have context: "Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again."

God knew Elijah was physically and mentally done. And the kindness thing God could do, was to let him pray, to watch him sleep and give him food. Of course, Elijah is a very unique prophet

under the Old Covenant, which is why, angles and miraculous food appear. But, the sleep and food, have a perfectly wonderful affect – he has energy and is reoriented to God to keep going. This is the picture of a present God in all of our broken painful moments in life.

So, Elijah eats, drinks, prays and sleeps. Which means, that after a day, when you are done a Christian has the ability to commit their body and mind to sleep by handing over worries and cares to God, who will be there to carry them when we wake up.

Recently, I read about Dr Gladys Mwiti who gave a talk at the [Mental Health Institute](#). She is a clinical psychologist in Sydney who often spends her days listening to people's experiences of trauma. An emotionally demanding job. Recently she shared how at the end of each day that she prays for these people and hands them over to the Lord. And she goes home. And she sleeps. Because she doesn't carry all of it with her.

Let me give you one more case study about that time Jesus slept on a boat.

Case Study: That time Jesus slept on a boat

Over in [Mark 4](#), Jesus, our saviour, knows what a tired mind and body feels like. He understands a lack of sleep and the need to rest. In verse 38 we learn that Jesus is in the stern of a boat sleeping on a cushion. After a busy day, Jesus is done. He falls asleep, safely, trusting God as he does, like the Psalms say. But, there's a furious storm going on around him, so much so that a few verses later, "The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" The disciples can't sleep. They think Jesus isn't doing enough, so they accuse him of not caring. And then, the calm in Jesus overflows into the storm as Jesus says, quite, be still and it all stops. As we saw in the Psalms, sleep and faith are linked. Jesus, is not only a model of what it means to trust God, But, as the disciples learn Jesus is the object of our faith. Here is one, who knows that God's eyes are on him at all times, who can lie down in safety and sleep.

This story is a collisions of humanity and divinity. To sleep is to follow the footsteps of Jesus, who also slept. But, it's the reminder that we trust the one who rules the seas, who is enthroned in heaven. The one who rules every storm, as we sleep.

Meaning: Sleep is still a gift when life is overwhelming. Which is why he says in verse 40, why so afraid? Do you still have no faith? Jesus invites us to lift our eyes from the storms, to him, to find shalom, in and through the troubles, by placing faith in him, and to then sleep as an exercise of faith and trust in God, just like we do with our days, we can do in our nights.

The difference God makes to sleep

We recognise that faith isn't a sleeping pill. But, faith has something to say to us in those moments.

Knowing the God who doesn't sleep does make a difference.

God is not like us, and that's the foundation for our hope and significance.

Let me offer you 3 ways forward at 1:30am or 9pm when you can't sleep:

Thank: Thank God for the gift of sleep. Thank God that he doesn't sleep and that he's looking after you and his world as you close your eyes. Sleep is a daily reminder of his grace and that, just as you close your eyes tonight, one day, you'll close them in death and see Jesus when you awake. Thank God that Jesus modelled sleep, that it's good to do and a way of trusting him.

Ask: In all the stress, anxiety and worry you feel, ask God to carry it this evening. Sleep creates pathways in our brain so that we can think, process and make healthy decisions. Ask God would give you a clear mind and carry your problems and cares, just like Jesus carried all your sin, on the Cross, shouldering the weight of it so you can know the God who doesn't sleep.

Remember: Sleep will be hard this side of eternity. We live in a world that makes it hard to sleep, our bodies chemicals sometimes aren't balanced well and it children make it hard. But, by the grace of God, we have shalom, peace, and are being re-built into his people.