

Take a Nap

Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is to take a nap. The average amount of sleep for Americans declined from more than nine hours per night in 1850 to seven hours in 1990.¹ Other studies verify what most of us know by experience, that many are operating with a serious “sleep debt.” While it’s true that both Jesus (see Luke 6:12) and the apostle Paul (see 2 Corinthians 6:5) occasionally were up all night for the sake of the kingdom of God, the Bible also tells us this about our Heavenly Father: “He gives His beloved sleep” (Psalm 127:2).

God made us a unity of body and soul, and one influences the other. When your soul is either happy or discouraged, it can affect how your body looks and feels. And when your body is exhausted, it tends to dampen the zeal of your soul. In fact, fatigue often weakens our resolve against temptation, and provides excuses for anger, lust, and other sins.

God made us to need sleep. Pastor and author John Piper once sat wearily on the side of his bed trying to develop a theology of sleep. After all, he reasoned, we could do so much more for God’s kingdom if we didn’t have to sleep nearly a third of our lives away. Eventually John concluded, “Sleep is a daily reminder from God that we are not God.”² We are neither omnipotent nor omniscient, and the need for sleep is a daily reminder of that. Every night we have to go to bed and leave things in the hands of God.

One word of warning: Don’t sinfully neglect your spiritual disciplines and then talk about the need to get some “spiritual” sleep. It’s one thing to occasionally be so tired from God-given

responsibilities that you can’t read the Bible or pray; it’s another to be often distracted by “the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things” (Mark 4:19), and then claim weariness as an exemption from the disciplines.

The body needs sleep just as the soul needs communion with God. Sometimes what pleases Him most is when “His beloved” receives a nap as His gift.

Excerpted from Donald S. Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life*
(Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 2003).

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¹ Richard A. Swenson, *More Than Meets the Eye* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2000), p. 55.

² John Piper, *A Godward Life* (Two Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1999), p. 364.