



This article is part of a series focusing on stewardship of the body through healthy choices. It is not intended to replace medical advice from your doctor. Rather, it is to provide a biblical framework for healthy considerations.

I will give you rest

[Jesus said] "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

Please take a moment to read through the creation account from Genesis 1 & 2. It should be abundantly clear that God had a plan and he executed that plan with careful precision. Everything that God made served a unique purpose. That included the sun, moon and stars which were given to regulate light, to govern the day and the night and to, **"serve as markers to indicate seasons, days, and years."** (Genesis 1:14 EHV)

God is not bound by time nor does he need sleep (consider Psalm 121:2-4). Yet, even God set aside time to rest on the seventh day and subsequently sanctified this day. In his perfect creation God established regular cycles of time, seasons and the gift of rest. But it's not just the sun, moon and stars that regulate cycles of time. Within the hypothalamus region of your brain sits the suprachiasmatic nucleus which establishes and controls your circadian rhythm. Your incredible Creator God designed your brain to have roughly 10,000 neurons whose primary function is to maintain your body clock. When your lifestyle is in sync with your God-given circadian rhythm, you likely have greater levels of energy and alertness. Moreover, your body is generally healthier. On the other hand, when your sleep patterns shift dramatically from day to day, or when work requires you to be awake all night (there are numerous studies on the correlation between working the night shift and an increased risk for chronic disease), or when lifestyle choices rob your body of needed sleep, it can have a deleterious impact on your body's overall health and wellness.

In a later article, we will discuss the physical and emotional benefits of work and exercise. But for now, consider these tips for maintaining a regular sleep pattern.

- Try to go to sleep at the same time each night and wake up at the same time each morning (try not to vary your sleep patterns by more than 30 minutes in the evening or in the morning even on weekends).
- Limit (or better yet, eliminate) screen time prior to bed. The artificial light from your TV or iPhone will inhibit your ability to fall asleep. Consider plugging your Wi-Fi into a timer so that it automatically shuts off in the evening.

- If you must work a night shift, use blackout shades to completely darken the room while you sleep.
- Limit your food intake and avoid caffeine in the evening.
- Prepare your body for sleep through evening routines including devotions and prayers. Not only will these routines help your body relax but time in the Word and prayer will also help you set aside worrisome thoughts as you cast your burdens on the Lord.
"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, 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)

God not only designed the 24 hour cycle of time but he also designed the 7 day week. A few years ago, I presented on the topic of the Sabbath Day at a Pastor's circuit meeting. I acknowledged that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament ceremonial laws and we are no longer bound by Old Testament Sabbath laws (consider Colossians 2:16-17). However, I questioned whether we are missing out on some of the physical and spiritual benefits that God intended when he established the Sabbath Day. Though Christians are free to worship on Sundays (the day of Christ's resurrection) rather than on Saturdays (the seventh day of the week), are we missing out on something when we go immediately from church to our busy schedules? Orthodox Jews avoid use of all electronic devices on the Sabbath Day. They enjoy delicious candlelight meals and quality family time filled with rich traditions on the Sabbath. Could your family safeguard God's gift of physical and spiritual rest by establishing new traditions on Sunday after church? Perhaps it means playing a game or putting together a puzzle rather than watching TV or playing video games. Maybe it would include a family walk or hike enjoying God's creation rather than watching a football game on TV. These might sound like drastic choices that would cause your kids to rebel! But slowly replacing the busyness of the world with the blessings of rest and family time will reduce stress and bring your family closer.

May God grant you rest first and foremost in Christ and his Word of peace! Furthermore, may he help you to discover physical and emotional rest as you establish meaningful and rich personal and family traditions! Sleep in the peace of Jesus!

**God, who made the earth and heaven, darkness and light,
 You the day for work have given, for rest the night.
 May your angel host defend us,
 slumber sweet your mercy send us,
 Holy dreams and hopes attend us all through the night.**

**Guard us waking, guard us sleeping, and when we die,
 May we in your mighty keeping all peaceful lie.
 When the last dread call shall wake us,
 Then, O Lord, do not forsake us,
 But to reign in glory take us with you on high.** (CW 590 stanzas 1 & 3)