

Thank God for Bedtime



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Discussion Guide

Note: Please use these questions flexibly. You may not have time to work through all of them. Pick the questions you think might help your group have a good discussion.

And don't forget to talk to God about what you talk about with each other.

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Introduction

1. What did you learn about the author and/or the book from the Introduction?

2. "By learning what the Bible says about sleep, we will learn a great deal about God, and about ourselves." (p.11)

How sceptical are you of this statement as you start reading the book?

(totally agree) 1 2 3 4 5 (very sceptical)

3. How would you rate yourself as a sleeper?

(I'm a disaster) 1 2 3 4 5 (I've got sleep nailed down)

4. What aspect of sleep do you struggle with the most?

- getting to sleep
- staying asleep
- depth of sleep
- length of sleep
- timing of sleep
- other _____

5. How does your experience of sleep affect you (i) generally, and (ii) as a Christian?

Chapter 1 pages 13-24

1. Have you ever "pulled an all-nighter"? What is the longest time you've ever been awake?
How did you feel at the end of it?

2. The key truth of this first section of ch 1 is: _____

3. What is the significance of this key truth?

4. On page 20, Geoff quite baldly asserts that "Weariness is normal." Do you think that is true generally? Is it true for you?

5. "[God] shares something of his boundless energy, if only we will turn to him." (p. 21)
What does "turning to him" look like in practice?

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Chapter 1 pages 24-38

In the previous section of chapter 1, we saw that God doesn't sleep—his hands are always on the steering wheel. This is an aspect of his 'sovereignty'.

1. In your own words, explain what it means to say 'God is sovereign':

2. Is it hard to believe God "rules over every single particle" (p25)? Why?

3. How critical are we to the fulfilment of God's plans for the world?

4. Do you know Christians who only ever attribute to God the 'good things' that happen to them? What might you say to them? When might you say it? When might you *not* say it?

5. What comfort could there possibly be in knowing God "creates calamity" (Is 45:7, p.27)?

6. What truth forms the foundation of our ability to trust God?

7. Should you ever lie awake at night worrying about loved ones who are still facing God's wrath? Why?

8. When does exercising 'responsibility' risk straying into sinfulness? Do you agree that "most of us know the difference" (p35)? Do you ever stray into this sin? In what areas of life are you most likely to do so?

9. Our need for sleep is a daily dose of humility. It is a reminder that he is in charge and we are not (p36). Are you thankful for that daily reminder? Do you ever express that thankfulness to God in prayer before you attempt to sleep?

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Chapter 2 pages 39-51

In the last chapter we focused on “the sovereignty and the goodness of the God who never sleeps”. “In this chapter we focus on some of the reasons that we might struggle to sleep as much as we should.” (p.41)

1. When approaching bedtime, generally speaking, how would you rate your emotions towards your sleep?

(negative feelings) -3____-2____-1____0____1____2____3 (positive feelings)

2. How would you describe the ‘season of life’ you are in with respect to your sleep patterns?

3. If you have young children, how much are they a factor in any lack of sleep you experience? When your child wakes you, is it hard to “make the most of it” and even “be thankful for those moments” (p.42)? Is there anything that would help you do that?

4. On page 42, a number of factors are mentioned as perhaps contributing to the epidemic of sleeplessness: alcohol and coffee consumption, more blurred lines between home life and work life, more shift work, longer commutes, electricity(!), poor parental models, ageing bodies, more nights away from home, and mental health issues.

Can you think of any other factors (personal or societal)?

5. Have you ever tried to use a device or technology to help you sleep (like the author did - p.43)? If so, did it help? How/why?

6. Do you agree that worries seem to press in far more when you are in the darkness (p.44) and it is meant to be time to sleep? If so, how do you generally attempt to deal with that?

Is prayer one of the things you do? If so, are your prayers “not just when we can’t sleep, but all the time”? (p.47)

7. “The idea of our loving heavenly Father watching over us in love should bring the greatest possible comfort.” (p.46) It *should*. But sometimes it doesn’t seem to. Why?

8. Do you agree that “at least for most of us, a good deal of our anxiety is best identified as sin” (p.50)?

The author identifies two situations when it may not be sin: where there is an anxiety disorder at play and when the anxiety comes from some sin committed against us. Are there other situations when anxiety may not be sin? Is it always simple to decipher (i.e. whether it’s sin or not)?

9. “Trust him during the daylight hours, prayerfully bringing your anxieties to him in a way that shifts your life, one sleep at a time, from fear to faith.” (p.51) Helpful advice? Why or why not?

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Chapter 2 pages 51-61

Having looked at worry and anxiety as reasons for our lack of sleep, in this section some other causes are dealt with: trying to achieve too much, chasing after worldly success, being too invested in our own ministry, and desire for entertainment and experiences.

1. If you routinely don't get enough sleep, which is the main cause for you:

- anxiety/worry
- trying to achieve too much
- chasing worldly success
- too invested in your own ministry
- desire for entertainment and experiences
- other: _____

2. Read Genesis 11:1-9. What attitude was behind the people's building of a city and tower? What, if any, similarities can you see between that attitude and our own attitudes today that lead to some of our sleeplessness?

3. Do you "long to throw off" your sleep limitations? (p.52) Do you see this as an attempt "to push back against God being God"? (p.53)

4. The author suggests that "overwork is fuelled by 'people-pleasing'". Do you agree? Why or why not? If you agree, how true is it for you?

If true, what is the solution (p.54) and how do you cultivate it?

5. Overwork can also be fuelled by a desire for our own ministry to succeed (p.55). At the same time, wanting to see God's Kingdom grow seems like a right and godly desire. What might be some indicators that your desire is more about *your ministry* and your self-esteem, than about God's Kingdom and his glory?

What is the solution, and how do you cultivate it?

6. On p.57 the point is made that there has never been a time when we had more entertainment experiences available to us. More options also means more decisions and choices having to be made each day. Even a visit to the supermarket presents us with thousands more choices to be made than it did 20 years ago.

Are you ever overwhelmed and exhausted by this modern experience? How does it impact on your godliness?

What is the solution, and how do you cultivate it?

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Chapter 3 pages 63-78

"... falling asleep unleashes a series of hidden processes through which God delivers essential health benefits to our bodies. It's more than an invitation to trust his sovereign care; it's also a chance to experience his personal healing care." (p.66)

1. On pages 70-71, there is a list of the health benefits of adequate sleep for any person:

- increases our ability to form both short-term and long-term memories
- helps us retain important memories and forget unimportant memories
- aids in learning and perfecting new skills
- guards against the onset of Alzheimer's Disease and other forms of dementia
- reduces the likelihood of at least some forms of cancer
- enhances our emotional stability, concentration, alertness, recall, and reaction time
- reduces the risk of heart attack, hypertension and diabetes
- assists with weight control and immunity
- helps us see reality more clearly

Which of these were you aware of before reading this book? Are you surprised by any of them? Will learning of any of them change your approach to your own sleep?

2. What are the potential additional benefits for a *Christian* person of adequate sleep?

3. In your own experience, how true is the following statement: "... adequate amounts of sleep become part and parcel of our pursuit of holiness" (p74) In what ways do you notice sleep affecting your holiness?

4. "...how God chooses to use us is his business; how we choose to care for ourselves is our business." (p 77)

True or false? Discuss.

5. "That means a desire to do good works—even the best possible work of preaching the gospel—doesn't override the wisdom or the necessity of getting enough sleep." (p.77)

Have you had a need to sacrifice some of your sleep recently to serve the Lord in some way? What made you think it was right to do that?

Are we serving the Lord when we sleep? Why? Why not?

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Chapter 4 pages 79-90

"Our dreams may just be the most elusive and the most bizarre thing about our entire existence." (p.79) "...when we wade into the world of dreams, we're wading into a world that is well beyond our comprehension." (p.80)

1. Are you a dreamer (i.e. do you often remember your dreams)? Do you have any entertainingly weird dreams you can share?

2. "Should I be looking at my dreams to glean some kind of guidance from God or a personal message from God?" (p.81)

The author's short answer is 'no'. Yet he then goes on to give a good number of examples from the Bible where God *did* in fact speak important messages to people in dreams or visions ("the waking version of dreams", p.87).

Explain in your own words why the author's answer is basically 'no' despite this biblical evidence.

3. If God *can* speak to us through our dreams, how would we know when he *does* and when it's just a meaningless dream to ignore?

4. If someone at your church shared with you that they had a dream which they felt sure was God calling them to serve as a missionary in Brazil, what would you say?

5. Have you ever met anyone who's journey to faith in Christ was significantly pushed along by a dream or a vision? How did you react to their story when you heard it?

6. What do you understand to be the meaning and significance of the Reformation slogan "sola Scriptura" (Scripture alone)?

[Read more: <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-real-meaning-of-sola-scriptura/>]

How does this slogan help us think about our dreams?

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Chapter 5 pages 91-103

1. On page 93, Geoff lists some of the popular books on 'busyness' published in the last few years. Have you read any of these (or others)? If so, why?

Have you ever seen/read a book about laziness?

2. "To be lazy is to neglect the good works that God has prepared for you to do and to ignore God-given opportunities to serve and bless others—and instead to fritter away your time with easy, fruitless, frivolous tasks." (p.94)

What do you think of this definition of laziness? Can you improve on it?

3. "In his kindness, God freely bestows good gifts on the righteous and the unrighteous, the deserving and the undeserving. But that doesn't mean he has removed all traces of cause and effect from this world. Far from it. If you work hard, as the ant does, you can expect the fruit to follow." (p.97)

If a Christian work colleague is given a promotion, should you say "Congratulations!"? Why/why not? Is there anything better to say?

If a pastor is appointed to a 'higher' office (say, becomes a bishop), should we say "Congratulations!"? Why/why not? Is there anything better to say?

4. "And while sleep is a good thing, the first part of Proverbs 6 reminds us that there's a time and place for foregoing sleep..." (p.99)

Have you made the choice to forego sleep recently? Why did you do that? Was it a right/wise choice?

5. "...admonish the idle" (1 Thess 5:14, p.100)

Do you know anyone who needs to be admonished for idleness? Is it easy to tell? What are the signs that idleness may be an issue?

Is there anything you should do *before* admonishing someone?

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Chapter 5 pages 103-119

1. In this section, Geoff discusses four different possible causes of laziness. What are they? Rank them (from 1 to 4) in terms of how significant they are in the Christian community you are familiar with (i.e. maybe think wider than your church, but within Christian circles you know quite well). i.e. 1 is the most prevalent cause, 4 the least.

Rank	Cause
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Which one is the biggest risk for you personally?

2. Complete the following table and circle the actions you need to take:

Cause of laziness	Theological truth(s) that counter the cause	Actions we can take to combat the cause

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Chapter 6 pages 121-131

In this chapter, the book is taking up the Bible's metaphor of awakesness/drowsiness in preparation for "crucial spiritual events" that are going to "unfold" around us (p.123).

1. As the footnote on page 128 points out, the Greek word translated as 'stay awake' or 'keep watch' is *gregoreo*. Look up some of the other places (apart from Mark 13-14) the NT uses that word and see what it is we are meant to watch out for... [we suggest you divide the passages up and report back on your findings to the big group]

Passage	What are we to watch out for? when? And what else are we meant to do?
Matthew 24:3-44 (<i>gregoreo</i> is in vv42 & 43)	
Matthew 25:1-13 (v13)	
Luke 12:35-40 (v37)	
Acts 20:25-31 (v31)	
1 Corinthians 16:13-14 (v13)	
Colossians 4:2 (v2)	
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (vv6 & 10)	
1 Peter 5:6-11 (v8)	
Revelation 3:1-6 (v2 & 3)	
Revelation 16:15-16 (v15)	

2. Staying awake is an interesting metaphor for the sort of spiritual hyper-vigilance that seems to be called for in many of these passages, because staying awake physically is hard to sustain over long periods. In your experience, what makes spiritual hyper-vigilance over a long time (potentially many decades) so difficult to sustain? Why is it so hard to live every day as if Jesus might return tomorrow?

3. On page 126 the author lists some of the "sedatives" that tempt us (money, career, etc). Are there any others you notice are common in your Christian network? Which ones do you relate to as risk factors for you?

4. How does getting good physical sleep help us to "stay awake" spiritually?

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Chapter 7 pages 133-143

In this chapter we go right to the heart of the gospel or 'Good News'.

1. On page 134 the author makes the somewhat startling point that if I am in Christ "it would be *unjust* and *wrong* for God not to forgive my sin". How do you react to that? Do you *know* that is true? Do you *feel* like it is true *for you*?

2. In your own words, what does it mean to "sleep the sleep of the justified"?

3. Do you "sleep the sleep of the justified"? If not, why not?

4. "The Bible often describes death as 'falling asleep'." (p.137) Why? What are the similarities that make going to sleep each night a "dress-rehearsal" (p141) for our death?

5. Do you ever pray a prayer, like the one starting on page 141, just before you go to sleep each night? If not, do you think it would be a helpful thing to do?

6. You visit a friend in hospital who is in the final stages of cancer and dying. She is tired, and confesses that she doesn't want to go to sleep because she is scared that she won't wake up again.¹ What might you say?

Appendix: Practical wisdom for a good night's sleep (pages 145-147)

Of all the tips offered, which do you do, or which have you tried? Which ones were most helpful? Are there any you think you probably ought to try?

¹ According to this article, such fears about going to sleep are very common:

<https://www.artofdyingwell.org/what-is-dying-well/our-journey-through-life/what-is-death-like/>