

A NICE PLACE TO NAP

Acts 20:6-12

(additional statistics from:

“AAAL Drowsy driving plays larger role in accidents than federal statistics suggest,”

www.usatoday.com, 2/8/18;

“4 Ways Sleep Deprivation Affects Work Performance,”

www.prescouter.com 2/2018)

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What makes you sleepy?

A warm bath?

A big meal?

A Sunday afternoon in the recliner with a one-sided football game softly lulling you to sleep in the background?

I know none of you would do this, but I actually know a few people who claim they don't go to bed until eleven or twelve o'clock at night, but the truth of the matter is that they sit on the couch starting at about 6:30, watching TV and nodding. He has his chair; she has her couch. They really do their best sleeping in front of the television, nodding up and down. They are in that pretending “I haven't gone to bed yet” state where you just really go to bed in the den.

Strangely enough, sometimes we get the very best sleep when we're not supposed to be sleeping.

I know what makes you sleepy sometimes – an airplane ride. Have you ever noticed the minute the plane takes off people start drooling, opening their mouth, and leaning their head against the window? I don't know if it's the altitude or if it's just traveling that wears you out – but you can count on about one-third of the people on a plane (if not more) sleeping on any given trip.

Maybe it's not an airplane for some of you. Maybe it's – well, maybe it's church that makes you want to sleep. The preacher begins to talk in those rhythmic tones. Slowly his voice sounds like Charlie Brown's teacher – waah, waah, waah, waah. The room is just a bit too warm. The sermon is just a bit too dull. (Not here – never here!) And you're just a bit too tired. Off to sleep you go.

One of the reasons you go to sleep is that you are just too tired when you get here. **Sixty-three percent of adults surveyed get less than the recommended eight hours of sleep per night. From that group, thirty-one percent get less than seven hours. Forty percent of the surveyed adults in the U.S. report having trouble staying awake during the day. And over the past five years, despite all of our innovations and computer technology, we have less time dedicated to sleep in the United States than we did five years ago.** (<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/sleep.html>)

We really have found ourselves at a dangerous state. We are a very drowsy people these days. Some call it Insufficient Sleep Syndrome. Others call it drowsiness. **Drowsiness is blamed for 38,000 deaths per year. There are 2,000 deaths in the United States every year because of drowsy drivers. The direct cost of drowsiness is \$16 billion a year. And the indirect cost of lost productivity is estimated at \$150 billion. Seventy million Americans are effected by drowsiness. In 1910, Americans averaged 9 hours of sleep per night. Today the average is down to 7, and many of us get less than that. In 1979, drowsiness played a role in the Three Mile Island nuclear plant accident and then, ten years later, contributed to the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska. (Houston Chronicle, 5/3/98, p. 1F)**

Edison messed everything up when he invented the light bulb. But Edison didn't really believe in sleep. In fact, that may be why he invented the light bulb. **Edison said, "Sleep is an acquired habit. Cells don't sleep. Fish swim in the water all night. Even a horse doesn't sleep. A man doesn't need any sleep." (http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/sleep.html)**

That's what Thomas Edison said. And so, he invented the light bulb.

I must say I, in many ways, agree with Edison. I think that sleep is way overrated. It's sad that a man 75 years of age who gets eight hours of sleep at night actually spends one-third of his life, or 25 years, asleep. Twenty-five years asleep – wasted life.

On the other hand, those of us who press the margin and try to get by without all the health benefits of sleep find ourselves, in the end, really probably less productive than those who get good rest and who are, therefore, more productive all day long.

There is a cumulative effect. The person who misses an hour and a half of sleep one night and then the next night and then the next night begins to feel far worse by Friday than he did on Tuesday. By the fifth night, he has lost seven and a half hours, or virtually a whole night's sleep. Then he felt like he was just praying to get through the day. Quite frankly, he is irritable, and unproductive. ("Surprising Facts About Sleep," *New York Times*, 5/15/90)

Max Hirshkowitz, research director of the sleep lab run by Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, says we've just become accustomed to being tired, but we really don't actually need less sleep. We fool ourselves. "We're running on half-battery," he says, "and we think we're OK. We don't even know what it's like to be alert anymore." Maybe Edison was smart, and he did cheat sleep. But then there is Albert Einstein, the great scientist, who had his amazing thoughts after he slept eleven hours every single night. (Houston Chronicle, 5/3/98, p. 1F)

Sleep does seem like such a waste. Yet, it increases our productivity and is absolutely necessary. So I join the rest of you who try to live on the edge and get just enough sleep to be at your peak, yet not so much that you actually end up wasting any productive time.

But of all places, would you believe that some people are actually trying to catch up on their sleeping in church?

It once was a crime to sleep in church – oh, it still is, but we just don't prosecute you. In 1646, Roger Scott was tried in Massachusetts for sleeping in church. It is said that in some of the earliest churches in America, men walked around with sticks in hand, and they would whack you solidly on the head with the stick during the service if you were caught sleeping in church. I think that may be too brutal for today, but I have thought about having a "sleep cam" where we would have a big screen up here and we would tell our camera men to find and focus on someone who is asleep. All of a sudden, your face is on the jumbotron and you are caught sleeping on the sleep cam. That might be a deterrent. I don't know.

Much worse things can happen in church when you're sleeping.

One pastor tells of his experience in a rural community where he pastored a small church. Wilbur and his wife, Leah, attended every Sunday morning. And Wilbur, a farmer, whenever he came into the house from the field just sat down exhausted and would always fall asleep. It was such a habit that when he came into church and sat on the pew, he would also fall asleep. Well, the pastor finally noticed that it had become such a disturbance that some of the members were taking bets on just how long it would take Wilbur to fall asleep. Or, put another way, they were taking bets on just how long the preacher could keep Wilbur awake on any given Sunday morning.

Wilbur's wife was embarrassed by his behavior, especially when he began to snore. She tried everything to keep her sleepy spouse awake. She complained to him that she was getting calluses on her elbow from poking him in the ribs in a futile attempt to keep him alert. One day, while shopping in the grocery store, she saw a small package of Limburger cheese. Leah bought it, and dropped it in her purse.

The next Sunday morning, the pastor had just started the sermon when Wilbur began to nod. When he finished the first point in a three-point sermon, he could see he was losing Wilbur. As he started the third point, Wilbur began to snore. Quietly Leah opened her purse, took out the Limburger cheese, and held it under her husband's nose.

It worked all right. Wilbur sat up straight and, in a voice that could be heard all over the sanctuary, said, "Leah, will you please keep your feet on your own side of the bed!" (<http://www.funone.com/jokes>)

I heard Jess Moody tell this one myself. He's an evangelist. He said he preached in a particular church and the minister of music slept on the front pew every single service. Deep, REM sleep. Moody said that one of the criticisms he received in seminary on his preaching was that he never used pregnant pauses. When you preach, you have to stop every now and again and let people catch up cognitively and emotionally with what you are saying. You can't just keep plowing through.

He was preaching away on the third night of the revival and he decided that it was one of those times when he ought to try one of those pauses – those pauses for punch. Since he had hummed along on night one and night two, he thought he might do even better on night three by pausing just a bit. When he did, the minister of music stood up, thinking the sermon was over, and said to

the congregation, “Let’s all stand together now for our hymn of invitation, hymn number 307, “Just As I Am.” The preacher was dumbfounded and stepped back from the pulpit. To save face for the minister of music, he let the hymn of invitation carry on. The funny thing was that more people were saved that night than any other night of the revival.

Where did all this begin – this sleeping in church? How would you like to be known as the first one to snooze in church?

His name is Eutychus. He, as far as we know, started the great tradition of sleeping during the sermon.

In Acts 20, Luke is with Paul and is taking notes, writing down the details. Paul and his traveling companions spent a week in Troas. They were awaiting the departure of their ship. It was their last day to be there. It was a Sunday, a work day of course for first century folks – these Jews, who would have rested on the Sabbath, on Saturday.

Paul met with the Christians for worship. This is one of the earliest references of Christians meeting for worship on Sunday, the first day of the week. Perhaps they continued to observe the Sabbath as well as Jews, but the Lord’s resurrection had been so earth-shattering that it was Sunday that becomes, eventually, the day of worship for Christians.

It was a question and answer time, more than just a sermon. But Paul is the kind of guy who, if someone asks him a question, answers it with a sermon. You’ve been in those situations where you are almost daring anybody to ask one more question because the speaker doesn’t know how to give short and sufficient answers. In fact, we learn further on in this text that Paul stayed up all night long answering questions for them.

Eutychus had never known a church service to go so long. The poor boy. He had questions. Others had questions. Everybody had questions. And for every question, Paul had a sermon. Paul could quote the Old Testament and go on and on. You could tell he was trained by Gamaliel, one of the best theology professors in the Jewish faith. People who were there became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. And even for people who had doubts, Paul had answers for them.

They took a few breaks, but the questions kept coming, and so did the sermons. The sun had set in the west, and it started to become dark outside. The people started lighting their oil lamps. The darker it got, the more people lit their lamps. They burned like candles, except they let a stream of black smoke curl into the air. They were asking questions, especially questions about the resurrection of Jesus. And Paul was making the point that God had power, even over death. He was talking about the resurrection of the Christ.

As Paul went on and on, the air in the room became thicker and thicker with the greasy odor and foul air of the oil lamps. Eutychus was already tired from a hard week of working and learning from Paul. He had a headache because he was so high up in the balcony and was getting all the stench of the lamps. He sat down in the window next to the fresh breeze of the

night air, hoping that the coolness would awaken him, hoping that it would help him concentrate just a little bit better.

But Eutychus began losing the battle against drowsiness. He didn't notice his head began to nod, but it did. He didn't notice that Paul's voice was changing, traveling further and further away. And he didn't notice the first second that he lost his balance and his body started falling out the window. He woke perhaps for just a brief moment during his fall, and then he died. Three stories down. Probably a head injury.

The women started screaming. Paul stopped speaking. And every head turned. "Eutychus fell out of the window," somebody screamed. The doctor, Luke himself, ran over to help, like our physicians do today. And the whole congregation ran behind him. Perhaps Luke called for a lamp. He looked in Eutychus' eyes. And in the professional opinion of this physician – Luke knows dead when he sees dead – he says, "I'm sorry. There is no hope."

Paul, older, by now tired, made his way down the stairs and through the crowd to where Luke was holding Eutychus' head in his arms. And Paul, like Elijah and Elisha, lay his body right on top of Eutychus' body and cried to God like a prophet, "O Lord God, let this boy's life return to him!" And the people were astounded by the resurrection of Eutychus. (Rev. Bill Versteeg, "Eutychus," [www.pbv.thunder-bay.on.ca/NetSermons/Acts 20str.html](http://www.pbv.thunder-bay.on.ca/NetSermons/Acts%20str.html))

And Paul went back to preaching (v. 11).

Sleeping in church is dangerous. Really, really dangerous. Oh, you're probably not going to fall out the window like Eutychus and die. Probably not. But if you sleep in church you're going to miss the power of the resurrection. Eutychus found the power of the resurrection by sleeping in church, but you're going to miss it by sleeping in church.

Paul had preached about the resurrection of Jesus and there was no greater undergirding for his sermon than to right there resurrect the dead. It was a sign of God's power. Death has no power in God's presence. But if you sleep in church, you don't know that. You don't feel that. You're not celebrating that.

And I'm not just talking about physical sleep. I don't think that's the most dangerous kind of sleep in church. There are a lot more people sleeping out there today – you just don't close your eyes. You're numb to the gospel. You're numb to the sermon. You're going through your life spiritually unconscious. You sleep in church because you think you've heard it all before or it's not important. You're not emotionally connected to the message.

And then, like Eutychus, you miss it. You miss it all, because you've not focused on the power of God and the resurrection of God.

Is God's word really important? If so, our worship hour this morning may be the most important hour of your week. In the Sunday School hour to follow, you're studying God's word with God's people. You've got to be focused on God, focused on his resurrection power.

When we are spiritually awake, we are focused on the resurrected Christ. We are focused on the kingdom of God. And when we're asleep, whether physically in church or just removed from the worship service – we've focused on the work week, we've focused on our own problems, we've focused on our own pressures – we've not focused on God.

I know you need your sleep. I need more myself. But when you ought to be worshiping Almighty God, that's the worst time to remove yourself or detach yourself. You ought to fall in the center of the fire of worship. You ought to focus on Christ.

Fred Craddock tells the story of a young women he met at a church in Atlanta. She told him that it was the first time she had ever been in a church.

“Really?” he said.

“Yeah.”

“Well, how was it?”

“Kind of scary.”

Craddock asked, “Kind of scary?”

“Yeah.”

“Why?”

And she said, “It just seems so important. You know, I never go to anything important. This just seemed so important.” (*Craddock Stories*, p. 132)

Does the gospel seem awfully important to you?