



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

June 12, 2016

**"Get a Life—Sleep In" (Encounters with Jesus Series)**

**The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun**

**P**salm 127:1 Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.

*Psalm 127:2 It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for the Lord gives sleep to His beloved.*

*Mark 4:37 A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.*

*Mark 4:38 But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"*

*Mark 4:39 He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.*

*Mark 4:40 He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"*

*Mark 4:41 And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"*

We continue with our series on Encounters with Jesus, and today's passage brings us to a most interesting topic that we rarely hear about from the church. And that is the topic of sleep. Why preach on sleep? Because sleep is supposed to be nearly a third of your life! Because you will feel

better if you sleep enough, and you may even be more Christ-like. Because sleep and dreams have a really profound, spiritual impact on our lives.

When we were looking for a new campus 12 years ago, First Prez member Don Parker had a dream in his sleep of me preaching here at Ko'olau, which led us to look at this property and begin the process to buy it.

In the Old Testament of the Bible, it was while sleeping that Jacob dreamed of God's angels ascending and descending a ladder that stretched from heaven to earth, which was a foretaste of Jesus Christ being our ladder to heaven.

It was during sleep that Joseph, son of Jacob, would have prophetic dreams that would foretell his role in his family and in creating the nation of Israel. It was also through his dream interpretations that eventually freed him from prison.

In the New Testament, it was in a dream while asleep that an angel appeared to Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, to tell him to take Mary as his wife even though she was already pregnant with Jesus. Again, it was while Joseph was sleeping that in a dream an angel warned him to run for his life and take Jesus and Mary to Egypt because King Herod was coming to kill Jesus. So you see, sleep is one of the primary times when God speaks to His people, and it can even save your life.

For us in deciding whether or not to sleep, I dare say that sleep might be a moral choice!

Dr. Scott Cormode is the Director of Innovation and a professor of leadership development at Fuller Seminary. Recently, he said to me, "Sleep is a moral choice so you will be your best tomorrow." That shocked me. A moral choice? But as I thought about it, yes, as followers of Jesus, we should always put our best foot forward. We should aim to be at our best – morally, spiritually, physically, emotionally. If getting enough sleep means we are more strengthened to make the right moral, spiritual, physical, and emotional choices, then yes, we need to get enough sleep. But a moral choice?

If being loving or unloving to others is a moral choice, then maybe sleep does have something to do with that because we tend not to be as loving if we don't get enough sleep. Lack of sleep can make us more irritable, cranky, argumentative, or demanding. Sometimes when we are tired we have moral lapses of judgment so it IS a moral choice to be rested.

Dr. Cormode, who got his Ph.D from Yale University, says that the key to spiritual formation is sleep! And you say, "What? Sleep?" He says the fruit of the Holy Spirit is hindered by lack of sleep. What is the fruit of the Holy Spirit? According to a book in the Bible called Galatians, which was written to the Christians in an area called Galatia:

**G**al 5: 22-23 *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

Dr. Cormode contends that all of those fruits that should be blossoming in our lives are hindered and dwarfed by lack of sleep. When we are tired, we are often less loving, less joyful, less peaceful, less patient, less kind, less generous, less faithful, less gentle, and often have less self-control.

A friend said she went on a spiritual retreat, and when she got there she told her spiritual director, "Okay, I'm ready for spiritual direction." And her director said, no. Sleep in for two days. Get more rest and THEN you will BE READY for spiritual formation.

So this sermon about sleep is deeply spiritual and also very practical. And in a moment I will talk more about our Bible passage. But for now, I want to make a few more introductory statements. The spiritually mature see a correlation between sleep and spiritual growth.

Some have said we live in a sleep-deprived state. Americans tend to not get enough sleep. It not only affects our spiritual growth but our physical health as well. Sometimes our day looks like this: Sleep. Wake up exhausted. Tell yourself you'll have an early night. Sleepy all day. Finally at night go to sleep. But then, wide awake at 2 AM. Finally go back to sleep. Wake up exhausted. And the cycle continues.

Here's a tip from your pastor: if you ever get caught sleeping at work with your head resting on your arms, slowly raise your head and say, "In Christ's name, amen," and they will think you were just praying. But, seriously, falling asleep at work is not good.

A March 23, 2014 article entitled, "Lack of Sleep: The 10 Most Profound

Psychological Effects," listed these effects of sleep loss:

### **1) Sleep loss causes accidents.**

Think of some of the most devastating accidents where sleep deprivation was involved: 1979 nuclear accident at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania; the massive Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska in 1989; the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown in the Ukraine in 1986;

They were all caused by employees deprived of sleep. As for the phrase "asleep at the wheel," let's bring it closer to home. A 2009 poll by the National Sleep Foundation showed that nearly one-third of all Americans fall asleep while driving. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that at least 100,000 crashes reported to the police each year are due to driver fatigue. [Coping with Excessive Sleepiness – What Lack of Sleep Does to your Mind by Camille Peri, webMD Feature, 2010, reviewed April 30, 2013]

They think the figure is actually higher because the driver either doesn't tell the police or didn't know they dozed at the wheel. Lack of sleep creates accidents and injuries on the job.

### **2) Sleep loss dumbs you down.**

Our cognitive brain processes get sticky when we don't have enough sleep. We lose attention, alertness, concentration, reasoning, and problem solving skills. And when we don't sleep enough, we won't be able to remember as well what we learned or experienced during the day.

I can spend a lot of time teaching you, but if you are sleep deprived, you won't even remember what I said. I hope you can even remember the topic of today's sermon by the time you get to your car!

### **3) Sleep loss can lead to serious health problems.**

Chronic sleep loss puts us at increased risk for heart disease, heart attack, heart failure, irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure, stroke, and diabetes. The probability of developing these ailments rise without enough sleep.

### **4) Sleep loss kills sex drive.**

Do I have your attention now? Lack of sleep means depleted energy, tiredness, and increased tension. In fact, Kaiser Permanente came out with an article entitled "How You Can Sleep Better" and it said you shouldn't be watching TV in bed, or reading your iPad or computer. Kaiser said, and I quote: "Reserve the bed for sleep and sex only." And at this point, I can hear all you HMSA members switching to Kaiser.

For many people, saying, "I'm going to bed" really means – "I'm going to lie in my bed and go on my phone" for Facebook, Twitter, email, or the news.

Now don't worry; I am going to get to the more spiritual part of the sermon. But if we don't get this part, we will always be so tired that we won't even get the spiritual part when it comes or have the strength to apply it to our lives. Let me rattle off, before you doze off, the final six profound effects of sleep loss:

### **5) It contributes to depression.**

### **6) It ages your skin.**

### **7) It makes you forgetful.**

### **8) It can make you gain weight.**

### **9) It may increase risk of death.**

As I said earlier, it doubles the risk of cardiovascular disease. Harvard Medical School reported (July 1, 2009) that the deepest stage of quiet sleep produces physiological changes that help boost your immune system. And in fact, research is now showing that it may not be that sleep deprivation is the result of psychiatric disorders, but sleep deprivation might actually CAUSE psychiatric disorders.

## 10) Sleep loss impairs judgment, especially about sleep.

It's a vicious cycle assessing what our sleep deprivation is doing to us. We are so sleepy that it's hard for us to determine we need more sleep and, therefore, we are in a weakened state to be motivated to be disciplined to get more sleep. So we continue not to get enough sleep. Sometimes we really need to go to our church healing services like tonight but because we are so tired, we skip it. Sometimes we need to be in a small group or a Bible study, but because we are too tired we don't go. If we were more rested, maybe we would make time for all of that.

So, bad sleep habits can cause memory loss, weight gain, stress, depression, and increased accidents. Good sleep habits are associated with things like weight loss, athletic stamina, higher grades in school, greater creativity, and longer life.

Last year, the National Sleep Foundation issued its new recommendations for the right amount of sleep depending on a person's age:

- Newborns = 14–17 hours
- Infants (4-11 months) = 12–15 hours
- Toddlers (1-2 yrs) = 11–14 hours
- Preschoolers (3-5 yrs) = 10-13 hours
- Children (6-13) = 9–11 hours
- Teenagers (14-17) = 8–10 hours
- Adults (18-64) = 7–9 hours
- Older adults (65+) = 7–8 hours

Now, I realize that some of you are in a certain season of your life. Maybe you're a physician working long shifts. Maybe you're a parent of young children, where you're up all night feeding the baby, or a single parent trying to juggle work and child care. If that's you, it means you have to find creative ways of fulfilling these responsibilities and still get the rest you need. And that may mean asking other people to help you, or finding ways to nap. For some of you it may be a medical issue, like sleep apnea, and

that means getting the professional help to solve it.

But many of us in this room are suffering from chronic, self-inflicted sleep deprivation. And though we may be deprived of sleep for a short season, we can't live our whole life that way. Sure, there are valid reasons for losing sleep, like an emergency where you need to take a loved one to the hospital. But there are also bad reasons, like wanting to stay up all night to watch TV, play video games, party, or watch porn. Or perhaps we are just so stressed and worried about life that we stay up.

Okay, so hopefully we are now really motivated to hear our Bible passages and receive some spiritual lessons about all of this.

*Psalm 127:1 Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.*

*Psalm 127:2 It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for the Lord gives sleep to His beloved.*

Did you hear that? It is in VAIN that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for the Lord gives sleep to His beloved. We don't need a Harvard report or a Yale graduate to tell us that. The Bible affirms that we should not be in a life cycle of rising early and going late to bed. If our life depends on it, and it does, we normally do have the choice to go to sleep earlier.

Many of my friends in the construction business have to be on the job at 5:30 am, so they go to bed by around 9 pm. They're disciplined about it. I remember how a young pastor said to me, "Dan, how do you get up at 6:30 am and still get your 7 hours of sleep?" I said, "Well, I go to bed by 11 pm. And it was a shock to her. She never realized

that she could go to bed earlier than her usual post-midnight time.

But what is more disturbing about the Bible passage is the phrase "eating the bread of anxious toil." One of the reasons we go to bed late and get up early is that maybe we eat the "bread of anxious toil." That means we are worried, anxious, and nervous about something, so no one can sleep. Jesus said:

*Matt. 6:25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"*

*Matt. 6:26 Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"*

*Matt. 6:27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?"*

Worry doesn't add anything to our life; it only subtracts. But here is God's promise. It says in the end of the Psalm, "For the Lord gives sleep to His beloved." The Lord wants to give you sleep. He wants you to be rested. The best way to gauge whether you are getting enough sleep is how you feel when you first get up.

Dr. Avelino Verceles, an assistant professor at the University of Maryland School of Medicine and director of the school's sleep medicine fellowship, says: "You shouldn't feel sleepy when you wake up. You should be energetic throughout the day and slowly wind down as you approach your usual bedtime." Hear that? It should be your normal life that you feel energetic throughout the day. So here is the big question: How does the Lord give His beloved sleep?

I think it has to do with trust. When we trust the Lord more, we receive more of His sleep.

Pope John the 23<sup>rd</sup> was reported to have said at the end of each day, and especially after a long hard day, "It's your church, Lord; I'm going to bed."

We may not have as much responsibility of the Pope, who is probably the leader of the largest number of Christians in the world, but we are indeed busy. Can we trust God more by saying every night before we go to bed – "It's your business, Lord. It's your sport. It's your school. It's your community. It's your house. It's really YOUR family. So Lord, it's in your hands. I trust you. I'm going to bed."

When we pray, after we have given God many thanks for the day, there must be a part when we, in essence, go over to the throne of God and hand over to Him our bag of worries for the day. We hand them over and say, "God, take care of these. I am your follower, but these are so great for anyone to hold. I put these in Your care." And then leave them at the base of His throne and walk away.

The problem is that most of us tell God our problems, worries, and anxieties, and then what do we do? We don't hand over our bag of worries. We walk out of the throne room with it so that we can do all of the worrying just the same. And God says, "Hey, I thought you were giving that bag to me?" We need to leave the bag, or else we won't sleep. We need to leave the bag and hear God say, "I got it. I got it. I am for you. I will help you. I love you. and I got it!"

We start sleeping better when we hand over our worries to God and trust that He is going to work on them on our behalf. When you go to the Bible, you will see that God is in the business of saying, "I got it." There is a long list of verses where, in essence, God is

saying, "I got it. Leave the darn bag with me." Here are some of them:

*Psa. 55:22 Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved.*

*1Pet. 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.*

*Prov. 3:24 If you sit down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.*

Here's another good one. A man named Job in the Bible loses everything –his children, his home, his crops, his livestock and his health. If I were Job I would be afraid and anxious. But God offers this promise to Job: "*You will lie down unafraid, and many will look to you for help.* (Job 11:19)

And think of King David who was running for his life for several years because King Saul wanted to kill him. Yet somehow, David could write this line in one of his psalms: "*In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O LORD, will keep me safe.*" (Psalm 4:8)

So I say to this church, come on! Trust the Lord! What are your options? You either pick up the bag of worries and think you can do it all on your own, or you give it all to God and trust that He will act on them on your behalf.

Jesus modeled a trust in the Heavenly Father in the Gospel reading today:

*Mark 4:37 A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.*

*Mark 4:38 But He was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him up and said to Him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"*

*Mark 4:39 He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be*

*still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.*

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Jesus is modeling to us sleeping in the Lord's presence. Jesus and the disciples are in the boat and the wind is howling, the waves are rising, and the water is flooding into their boat. And yet Jesus is sleeping. He is calm. He is so CENTERED in the Heavenly Father that He knew that ultimately no harm would come to Him. The disciples thought they were perishing, but no, Jesus was in control. He could control the wind and the waves. It's like He said, "I got it! I got this one under control." Jesus can take care of the winds and waves in our lives.

When we go through hard and challenging times, we have got to hear Jesus saying to us, "I got this one under control." I know for all of us we have gone through worry for ourselves or for our family – will they get that job, will we have enough money, what about my health, their health, what about that difficult relationship that shows no forgiveness? And that point, Jesus says: What are you afraid of? And have you no faith? What is the basis of your fear? In other words, what is the worse thing that could happen?

But then the killer question comes at the end of what Jesus said in that Bible passage. Do you have faith that Jesus is with you in the midst of the situation and He says, that I got it?

The next time you can't sleep, then get up from your bed and pray. Tell God what you are worried about. Tell Him about the waves and the wind in your life. Tell Him why faith is hard. He will listen.

I am not being super spiritual. I'm being practical. Pray when you can't sleep that God might put aside your worries or that you will finally be able to say, "Hey, my life is yours. I am going to bed now. Good night." And then give God your bag of worries and don't take it back.

And then I pray that your life will be like Jeremiah the prophet who was persecuted, hunted down to be killed, was in conflict with false prophets but he still could go to sleep and one day awoke and said, "At this I awoke and looked, and my sleep was pleasant to

me." (Jer 31:26)

Sleep can be PLEASANT when God is at the very center of our lives. What a nice word. But for many of us, we have always thought that if we don't do enough then we are against God's will and being disobedient. But I say to you, if you do MORE THAN what God wants you to do, then you are being EQUALLY as disobedient for not doing what He wants you to do.

What does He want from you? To trust God. Choose to trust God. Hand Him your bag of worries and hear Him say, "I got it!" God has to be at the very center

of your life, your home, your job, your social life, finances, hobbies, and health. For this is the truth:

*Psalm 127:1 Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.*

*Psalm 127:2 It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for the Lord gives sleep to His beloved.*

Sleep well tonight, for the Lord desires to give it to you. Amen? Amen.