

How to Get a Good Night's Sleep

Surviving Evil . . . Under the Sun, Part 4

Ecclesiastes 5:8-12

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Ever wonder why achieving a good night's sleep is so often out of reach? Do the long nights drag on as your mind whirls with thoughts of troubles and restlessness? King Solomon writes in his personal journal about his practical life experiences with this very real problem, a problem even this wealthy king had to toil with. God uses Solomon to teach current 21st century believers how to live with a proper attitude toward money and God resulting in a better night's rest.

Discussion Points:

There are times, places, and situations when you may find yourself at the bottom of the totem pole. Unless you have some clout or the money to make some noise, you will probably never be heard, but Solomon instructs how to sleep well even in this situation.

- Everybody seems to be on the take; even the king (or another leader) may be a part of the problem. How is a believer to sleep well under this pressure?
- What should you do and how should you behave if you are trapped in a governmental system that offers no help and no hope for the poor man trying to scratch out a living?
- How does the truth of God's word, correctly interpreted, apply to any generation, in any culture, and under any kind of government, including monetary and fiscal issues?

Contentment with a grateful spirit is a treasure far above a large paycheck.

- Why is the love of money so destructive?
- Is your breath and conversation for material things or spiritual things?
- Have you found that you are obsessed with keeping your things and your bank account safe? What does that tell you about what you are living for? How does that reflect a grateful spirit or lack thereof?

Discussion Guide Cont.

Money, and everything related to it, has the ability to keep you up at night.

- Why is it best to trust the highest authority of all, God's sovereignty, over monetary security?
- How does trusting in your Sovereign, purposeful, involved, Lord provide you comfort and peace through difficult financial times or even when times are extremely fruitful?
- How do you pursue contentment with where God has placed you? In what ways and situations do you give Him thanks for what He has given to you?

Gospel Connection:

Solomon reminds us all that there is *Someone* higher than us. There is no one higher than God, and He is watching over all that happens. You happen to belong to Him because you are in His family by faith in Jesus Christ, His Son. You can trust in Him and experience grateful contentment in your life.

Practical Implications:

Think: How do I sleep at night? What is contributing to that?

Pray: Gratefully thank Him for providing for your needs.

Do: Read your Bible before you climb into bed. Pray as your head rests on the pillow and practice your trust in the One who is over all earthly power.

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Surviving Evil . . . Under the Sun, Part 4

Ecclesiastes 5:8-12

My wife and I were watching a television show this weekend and a commercial kept coming on with a guy selling a pillow. It was called My Pillow. The owner was guaranteeing a good night's sleep. We must have watched that commercial 47 times. It made me sleepy. That pillow is popular; in fact, that man, the owner, in the commercial has sold 41 million of them, and that is because people want the same thing - anything to help them get a good night's sleep.

Maybe you are old enough now to know that the average amount of sleep you need is usually one hour more. Oh, for just one more hour. And many times, the problem is that you just can't fall asleep. You try everything. You read all the ads in the back of the newspaper. You try counting sheep. You thumb through Good Housekeeping Magazine, which ought to knock you right out, but even that doesn't work.

One of the first things you have to deal with as a young parent is training your children to be alone and settle into their crib and go to sleep - at least, that is the theory.

This past Christmas our youngest daughter flew home with their one-year-old son. Her husband had to work and she braved the flight with her baby. She was exhausted when she arrived. Little Tucker was exhausted too, but he didn't want to lay down in this strange new environment and in a crib he wasn't used to.

Marsha and I could hear him sort of settle down, but then he would rouse up all over again and start wailing away. He did not want his

mother out of the room. Finally, it was around 10:00 at night, all the other grandchildren were asleep (we wanted to keep it that way) when I went upstairs and volunteered to try my hand at it.

Tucker's mom laid him back down in the crib and slipped out as I took her place without him knowing. The lights were out; it was completely dark. He couldn't see me, but I could see him because of his glow-in-the-dark pacifier. It was like a beacon. It was moving all around, up and down, as he looked everywhere; he could not see me, though I was less than two feet away. When he stood up and began to wail, I stepped forward and laid him back down and put his pacifier back in his mouth, then stepped back without saying a word. At first that really messed up his mind - some invisible person had just laid him back down again. He lay there for a minute before standing up and wailing again. I stepped forward and laid him back down. After a few minutes he stood back up, but I stepped forward and laid him back down. This went on for an hour until, finally, I fell asleep. No - he finally fell asleep.

A survey I came across recently claims that Americans have the hardest time falling asleep. The United States, France, and Taiwan rank among the top three most sleep-deprived nations in the world. I found it interesting and not all that surprising where this study revealed that nearly 70% of sleep-deprived individuals can't sleep because they are anxious or troubled or worried, in one way or another, regarding some

issue related to finances.ⁱ That would include job security, retirement savings, investment accounts, debt, income levels, bills coming due, possible losses on Wall Street, corporate changes that might affect their job, looming college bills, needed home repairs, and on and on and on.

Even as believers, we know what that's like. Our minds begin to spin and our hearts are troubled, like a little 1-year-old in a strange new environment. We so easily forget that we can't see Him, but our Heavenly Father is in the room with us less than two feet away.

In some of the most practical homespun advice, Solomon essentially informs us of a couple of issues that can rob us of peace and trust and even take away from us what he will refer to as the sweetness of a good-night's rest.

Oppression of the Poor

Money is involved . . . but that is not all. Take your copy of Solomon's private journal and turn to **chapter 5** – let's pick our study back up where we left off, with **verse 8** – and read about the first troubling issue Solomon points out:

If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter (Ecclesiastes 5:8a).

Solomon is referring to the poorest of the poor, the day-laborer who is being oppressed in some matter.ⁱⁱ The word translated violation comes from a Hebrew word *gezel*, pronounced gaze-el, which actually refers to robbery or plunder. This man is being robbed of his land or his goods, or he is being robbed of a just verdict in court. Because he is poor, he would not have the money for defense lawyers; he could not afford to take time off from work and defend himself; he can't afford to wait but he can't afford to speed up the process.ⁱⁱⁱ He is at the low-end of the totem pole and has no way up or

out. And yet Solomon advises him ***to not be amazed at the matter***.

Don't be amazed.

The verb means to be startled; to be fearful and bewildered.^{iv} The situation is out of your control. It doesn't seem fair; it is the kind of thing that can keep you up all night. It isn't right and there is nothing you can do about it.

Solomon essentially defines the typical bureaucratic governmental system of the day, and Solomon should know because he was the dictatorial potentate of his own kingdom. This is how the governments of the world, the political systems, and even the corporate systems typically operate. If you are down there on the totem pole, unless you have some clout or the money to make some noise, you will probably never be heard.

Notice further in **verse 8**:

Do not be amazed at the matter (here's how it works) ***for the high official is watched by a higher*** (official); ***and there are yet higher ones over them*** (Ecclesiastes 5:8b).

Solomon describes the bureaucratic food-chain. High officials are watched by even higher officials and on up the ladder. Your boss has a boss who has a boss. Solomon says they are all watching each other. The idea behind the word ***watching*** is hard to translate; it is not clear in the language if they are watching each other to protect each other from being caught or if they are watching each other to make sure no one takes more of a cut than they should. Regardless, the poor guy comes out on bottom.^v

With that Solomon goes on to cynically add in **verse 9**:

But this is gain for a land in every way; a king committed to cultivated fields (Ecclesiastes 5:9).

In other words, if you understand this phrase in its cynical, negative context, he is saying that everybody is in on the take, everybody is getting something from the land. The New Living

Translation reads and *even the king milks the land for his own profit*. The king is committed to the harvested fields because he gets his royal share. In other words, even the king is not part of the solution, he is another part of the problem.^{vi}

Travel around the world today or watch the international news, the majority of governments are described in some way right here in Solomon's journal. We are hearing much today about different isms: socialism, fascism, Nazism, and capitalism. These are governmental systems that treat wealth and power and personal rights very differently from one another.

Several years ago I filed an article away; I thought this would be the perfect time to quickly read it. And by the way, imagine over these past several thousands of years since Solomon wrote this entry how people have lived under all kinds of governments of the world. I have imagined them reading with great encouragement Solomon's advice not to be amazed – not to despair – even if they are not on the receiving end.

Let me give you a two minute overview of world-governments:

- **Dictatorships and Communism:** This is when you own two cows but you have to give both cows to the government and they then give you some milk.
- **Fascism:** You own two cows; you keep them but have to give all the milk to the government which they sell back to you.
- **Nazism:** You own two cows, however the government shoots you and takes both of them.
- **Socialism** (We have heard a lot about that lately): You own two cows, but you have to give one of them to the government and they give it to somebody else for free.
- **Capitalism:** You own two cows; the government does not interfere, so you sell one cow and buy a bull.

So what happens when you are trapped in a governmental system that offers no help and no

hope for the poor man trying to scratch out a living? It might be the terror of Nazism, or the corruption of communism, or the unfairness of socialism, or even some prejudice within capitalism. Solomon's journal has been read by God's people, over the past 3,000 years, living in all kinds of cultures and under all kinds of systems of government. But the truth of the matter is that God's word, correctly interpreted, applies to any generation, in any culture, and under any kind of government.

You can boil down this counsel into one principle:

Trust the highest authority of all.

For this disadvantaged poor person in this text, he is not one of the high officials on the totem pole of power; the last thing he might get is a good night's sleep. He has every reason to worry and fret and stay up biting his nails. We won't get far enough into *chapter 5* where Solomon will lay it out, but he is hinting at it here as he writes in *verse 8*:

Do not be amazed . . . for the high official is watched by a higher (official), and there are yet higher ones over them (Ecclesiastes 5:8b).

He is reminding us all that there is *Someone* higher than everyone. There is no one higher than God, and He is watching, too, and you happen to belong to Him because you are in His family by faith in Jesus Christ, His Son. The softest pillow, and you can't buy this one, is trusting in the sovereignty of God. He is ultimately in control. The Bible tells us that:

There is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God (Romans 13:1).

In other words, any world power, any boss, any country that has any power has that power because, and only because, God has granted it

for a moment in time to fulfill His ultimate purposes.

Solomon wrote in Proverbs 8:15-16, *By me kings reign, and rulers decree . . . by Me princes rule, and nobles, and all the judges of the earth.*”

As one author put it, “God’s hands are behind the headlines.” God will have His way in the end.^{vii} God is literally guiding history toward the harbor of eternity. So don’t be dismayed . . . don’t panic . . . look up . . . trust in the highest authority over all – the true and living God.

Part of the problem is that we allow the late news to dictate what we think about when we go to bed.^{viii} Read your Bible before you slip into bed. Pray even as your head hits the pillow and rehearse your trust in the One who is over all earthly power. It might be dark, it might be confusing, but He is in the room. He is less than two feet away.

One early believer wrote a document, now more than 1,000 years old, and he recommended saying out loud before bedtime these words,

“Be off, Satan, from this floor and from these four walls. This is no place for you; there is nothing for you to do here. This is the place for the Apostles . . . this is the place for gospel; and this is where I intend to sleep now that my [day] is done, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.”

The second principle from Solomon’s entry here in *Ecclesiastes chapter 5* could be highlighted this way:

Pursue the best treasure of all.

Solomon begins to describe someone who accepts what God has provided with contentment and gratitude, and he will take the entire chapter to lay it out. Contentment with a grateful spirit is a treasure far and above a bigger paycheck. Solomon begins a very frank discussion about it right here in *verse 10*:

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity
(Ecclesiastes 5:10).

Notice Solomon does not write ‘he who *has* money will not be satisfied with money’ or ‘he who *has* wealth.’ No, **he who loves money . . . he who loves wealth.** The key word is *love*. The Hebrew verb means to desire, literally, to breathe after.^{ix}

Paul picks up this same idea in 1 Timothy 6:10 – *the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.* Not money, but the love, the longing - the love of money, Paul writes, is the root, the first step, towards all kinds of evil.

This Hebrew verb is used throughout the Old Testament for:

- Ruth loving Naomi – (*Ruth 4:15*)
- Elkanah loving his wife Hannah (*1 Samuel 1:5*)
- Abraham loving his son, Isaac (*Genesis 22:2*)
- Rebekah loving her son Jacob (*Genesis 25:28*)
- David the Psalmist loving the word of God – the testimonies and precepts of God’s word (*Psalms 119*)
- Believers loving God (*Deuteronomy 6:5*)
- Jeremiah used the verb to accuse people of loving to wander (*Jeremiah 14:10*)

Obviously the word is used for something someone is really committed to pursuing. And Solomon writes here that it is possible for someone to be that committed to money. The word he uses for money here in *verse 10*, is *keseph*, the word for silver. They are after all the silver they can get their hands on.

Maybe you work next to people like this? Their desire, their conversation, their longing, and their desire is all about their money, their latest purchase, their latest commission, their latest raise, the stuff they already have, or the stuff they really want. Their breath and their conversation is for material things.

What Solomon begins doing here, and he will stay after it for the rest of the chapter and into the next one, is begin to give very practical, down-to-earth reasons why this kind of longing is actually going to rob you of a good night's sleep.

1. You will never have enough.

Notice again where Solomon writes in the first part of *verse 10*:

He who loves money (silver), will not be satisfied with money (silver) (Ecclesiastes 5:10a).

And Solomon should know, by the way, given the fact that he had so much of it. He imported 25 tons of gold every single year. His net worth has been estimated in today's money at 2.3 trillion dollars. To put that into perspective, Solomon was 10 times wealthier than Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, Jr. – combined. Nobody on the planet comes close to Solomon. If anybody should be listened to about the emptiness of silver, Solomon is that man.

2. You will never earn enough.

Notice *verse 10* again:

Nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity (Ecclesiastes 5:10b).

The word here for wealth (*hamown*) refers to possessions and the word for income (*tebuwah*) refers to annual revenue or assets.^x Your account will never grow large enough for you to relax and say as you lay in bed at night, “My bank account is finally big enough; my paycheck is fat enough; my retirement account is large enough.”

3. You will never feel safe enough.

Solomon writes next in *verse 11*:

When good increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? (Ecclesiastes 5:11).

In other words – what advantage is it to see it all slipping through your fingers? What is happening here? Solomon effectively writes here that the more you make the more you multiply people who want to take it away from you. The Message paraphrases this so well, “*The more loot you get, the more looters show up [to get it]!*”

- Who is that relative who suddenly showed up asking for help?
- Where did all these friends come from who want to take you out to lunch?
- Will the government demand more taxes from you?
- Will your investments vanish overnight?
- Should you protect your money off-shore?
- Are your employees going to rip you off?
- Is that guy pitching an investment plan going to be careful enough?
- Where did all these people come from?

You have heard that old saying, “You never knew how many friends you had until you bought a beach house.” Maybe you have discovered this is true.

One of the things that can keep you up at night is wondering if your friends are your friends because of *who* you are rather than because of what you own - and they want to have. If you are living for things you will grow obsessed with keeping them safe, and you will never feel quite safe enough.

You don't have to imagine the cynicism and frustration that grew in Solomon as he reached the end of his life, you can read it in his private journal.

4. You will never sleep soundly enough.

Solomon writes in *verse 12*:

Sweet is the sleep of a laborer whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep
(Ecclesiastes 5:12).

Did you notice how Solomon has come full circle? The guy, the day-laborer who couldn't get a fair shake in court or on the job who Solomon felt sorry for in *verse 8*, now has the advantage when the lanterns are turned down and the stars come out at night. Look at him - falling asleep. Now look who has it best. Money, and everything related to it, has the ability to keep you up at night.^{xi}

This poor man who has the ability to sleep is further described in *chapter 5* as someone who is contented with what God has provided. You want a good night's sleep? Perhaps it begins with these rather practical principles –

- Trust the highest authority of all; in other words, place your head on the soft pillow of God's sovereignty. It is the softest pillow money can't buy.
- Trust in your Sovereign, purposeful, involved, Lord. You might not be able

to see Him in the darkness of the night, but He can see you. He is less than two feet away.

- Trust the highest authority of all.
- And pursue the best treasure of all – contentment with where God has placed you, giving Him thanks for what He has given to you.

Uncle Bud Robinson preached for many years a century ago. Uneducated, he would preach to people on the frontier, in small towns, and in the country. He was deeply sincere and amazingly fruitful in ministry. As an older man, he was once taken by friends to New York City. He had never been to a big city, and they wanted to show him the amazing sights, shop in the biggest stores, and introduce him to all of the latest inventions. After showing him the sights the city had to offer, he was overheard praying by his bed on the night before he left, "Lord, thank You for letting me see all the sights of New York City. And I thank You most of all that I didn't see a thing I wanted."^{xii}

With that he climbed into bed and he fell asleep.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/9/2020 by Stephen Davey.

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i Meredith Melnick, "Why Americans Are Among the Most Sleepless People in the World," *Time* (11-11-10); Meredith Melnick, "Sleep America: Are You Getting Enough Rest at Night?" *Time* (3-4-11)

ii John Jarick, translator; Gregory Thaumaturgos *Paraphrase of Ecclesiastes: 231 A.D.* (Scholars Press, 1990), p. 125

iii Adapted from William D. Barrick, *Ecclesiastes: The Philipppians of the Old Testament* (Christian Focus, 2015), p. 95

iv R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer, Bruce Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament: Vol. II* (Moody Press, 1980), p. 972

v Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, General Editors: *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Vol. 6* (Zondervan, 2008), p. 307

vi Adapted from Philip Graham Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters* (Crossway, 2010), p. 131

vii David Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth* (Integrity Publishers, 2004), p. 119

viii Richard Foster, *Leadership*, Vol. 3, no. 1.

ix Samuel Tregelles, translator, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Mott Media, orig. 1847; reprinted 1982), p. 16

x Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes* (IVP Academic, 1983), p. 117

xi Adapted from Ryken, p. 133

xii Jeremiah, p. 126