

Rest, Sleep & the God Who Never Slumbers

Jonathan D. Holmes



rest

Kelly Kopic

Sleep is a spiritual discipline that daily reminds us of our lack of control. Just as a king is not saved simply by the size of his army or a warrior by his strength alone (Ps. 33:16–18), so sleep reminds us daily that we can't rescue ourselves: we are never strong enough, we never know enough, we never can do enough to eliminate our vulnerability. And so *sleep is an act of faith*. It requires us to see our finitude as a good part of God's design for us.

Outline:

- The Struggle to Sleep
- A Theology of Sleep
- Hope When We Sleep
- Help for a Season of Sleeplessness

The Struggle to Sleep

Courtney Reissig

This has been one of the hardest lessons God has been teaching me lately. I need far more rest than I get. My lack of rest is more often owing to my failure to admit my finiteness than it is my hard work or busy schedule. I like getting things done, and often sleep—even though I enjoy it—feels like a nuisance, a hindrance to my productivity. But I need rest, even if I don't want to admit it.

Tish Harrison Warren

[My] willingness to sacrifice sleep also reveals less noble loves. I stay up later than I should, drowsy, collapsed on the couch, vaguely surfing the Internet, watching cute puppy videos. Or I stay up trying to squeeze more activity into the day, to pack it with as much productivity as possible. My disordered sleep reveals a disordered love, idols of entertainment or productivity.

Tish Harrison Warren

In the nitty-gritty of my daily life, repentance for idolatry may look as pedestrian as shutting off my email an hour earlier or resisting that alluring clickbait to go to bed.



A Theology of Sleep

1. Sleep affirms the character of God

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Isaiah 40:28–29:

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,
The Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;
His understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint,
And to him who has no might he increases strength.

1. Sleep affirms the character of God

Genesis 2:1–3

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished,
and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God
finished

his work that he had done, and he rested
on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy,
because on it God rested from all his work
that he had done in creation.

Daniel Doriani

The labor of creation did not "exhaust him or bind him" to the world. After his towering achievement, God chose to rest and assess. We should as well, for we too are more than our work.

1. Sleep affirms the character of God

Psalm 127:1–2

Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.
It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.

2. Sleep reveals the reality of our humanity

2. Sleep reveals the reality of our humanity

Mark 4:35–4

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

3. Sleep offers us a pathway to present rest

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Cleveland Clinic highlights three things in particular that happens when we sleep:

1. Brain maintenance
2. Energy conservation and storage
3. Self-repair and recovery

4. Sleep gives us a picture of future rest

Joe Deegan

If we believe God designed our bodies with utmost intentionality, then why did he design us to sleep? Any doctor or scientist could tell you the numerous benefits our bodies get from sleep. But God, the Creator, could've given us those benefits by any number of methods. So why did he choose sleep? Why did he create us to be functionally lifeless for a third of our lives? Could it be that in the daily cycle of sleeping and waking, God is reminding his children again and again that resurrection is not a tall tale but something woven through the fabric of his creation?



Hope When We Sleep

He is working all things together for our good.

Romans 8:28 – And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

He is completing the good work of redemption he began in us.

Philippians 1:6 – And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

He is counseling you.

Psalm 16:7-8 – I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

He is sustaining you.

Psalm 3:5 – I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the LORD sustains me.

He is keeping you safe.

Psalm 4:8 – In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

He is keeping you.

Psalm 121:3-5 – He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand.

He is steadfastly loving us and giving us new morning mercies.

Lamentations 3:22–24 – The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

He is making intercession for us on our behalf.

Hebrews 7:25 – Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

He is advocating for us before the Father.

1 John 2:1 – My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin, But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Help for a Season of Sleeplessness

- * Define some terms
- * How many people struggle
 - * Why do they happen
 - * How can we help

1. Define Some Terms

- Sleep disorders (or sleep-wake disorders) involve problems with the quality, timing, and amount of sleep, which result in a daytime distress and impairment in functioning. Sleep-wake disorders often occur along with medical conditions or other mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, or cognitive disorders.

1. Define Some Terms cont.

- There are several different types of sleep-wake disorders, of which insomnia is the most common. Other sleep-wake disorders include obstructive sleep apnea, narcolepsy, and restless leg syndrome.
- Common symptoms of insomnia include but are not limited to: feeling tired unwell, or sleepy; delayed reflexes; trouble remembering things; mood disruptions, especially irritability; disruptions in work or social routines; slowed thinking or trouble concentrating.

2. How many people struggle?

Cleveland Clinic: Both the acute and chronic forms of insomnia are very common. Roughly, 1 in 3 adults worldwide have insomnia symptoms, and about 10% of adults meet the criteria for insomnia disorder.

3. Why do they happen?

Sleep difficulties are linked to physical, emotional, and spiritual dynamics/problems.

4. How can we help and care for those who struggle with sleeplessness?

(1) Encourage good sleep hygiene

During the Day:

- * Exercise regularly
- * Monitor caffeine intake
- * Avoid alcohol
- * Avoid naps in the afternoon
- * Go to bed at a regular time (sleep schedule)

4. How can we help and care for those who struggle with sleeplessness?

(1) Encourage good sleep hygiene

Before you go to sleep

- * Monitor liquid intake/need for the bathroom.
- * Begin winding down 30–60 minutes in advance of going to sleep.
- * No screentime before bed
- * Read and pray before you go to sleep
- * Consider your sleep setup
- * Sleep aids

4. How can we help and care for those who struggle with sleeplessness?

(1) Encourage good sleep hygiene

* Sleeping doesn't mean your brain is totally inactive. While you're less aware of the world around you, you still have plenty of detectable brain activity. That brain activity has predictable patterns. Experts organize those patterns into stages. The stages fall broadly into two categories: Rapid eye movement (REM) sleep and non-REM (NREM) sleep.

4. How can we help and care for those who struggle with sleeplessness?

(1) Encourage good sleep hygiene

There are three NREM stages. When you fall asleep, you typically enter NREM stage 1 and then cycle between NREM stages 2 and 3. After that, you go into REM sleep and start dreaming. After the first REM cycle, you start a new sleep cycle and go back into stage 1 or 2, and the cycle starts over.

4. How can we help and care for those who struggle with sleeplessness?

(1) Encourage good sleep hygiene

* One cycle normally takes about 90–120 minutes before another begins. Most people go through four or five cycles per night (assuming they get a full eight hours of sleep).

4. How can we help and care for those who struggle with sleeplessness?

(1) Encourage good sleep hygiene

* Rapid eye movement (REM) sleep is the stage of sleep where most dreams happen. Its name comes from how your eyes move behind your eyelids while you're dreaming. During REM sleep, your brain activity looks very similar to brain activity while you're awake.

4. How can we help and care for those who struggle with sleeplessness?

(1) Encourage good sleep hygiene

* REM sleep makes up about 25% of your total time asleep. Your first REM cycle of a sleep period is typically the shortest, around 10 minutes. Each one that follows is longer than the last, up to an hour.

4. How can we help and care for those who struggle with sleeplessness?

(1) Encourage good sleep hygiene

After you wake:

* Sleep journaling/Oura ring/wearable tech

Tish Harrison Warren

The liturgy of my night—lock the doors, brush my teeth, get a glass of water, turn out the lights, pull back the covers, crawl into bed, curl up, close my eyes—is a repetitive, mundane, and good thing, through which I've learned to slow down, to let go of the day behind me, and go to sleep.

4. How can we help and care for those who struggle with sleeplessness?

(2) Reframe their sleeplessness in light of biblical truth

2 Corinthians 11:27–28 – in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Psalms 119:62, 147–148 – (62) At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous rules.

(147–148) I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in your words. My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promise.

4. How can we help and care for those who struggle with sleeplessness?

(2) Reframe their sleeplessness in light of biblical truth

Psalms 77:2–6 – In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted. When I remember God, I moan; when I meditate, my spirit faints, Selah

You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I consider the days of old, the years long ago. I said, "Let me remember my song in the night; let me meditate in my heart." Then my spirit made a diligent search.

Kelly Kopic

There are various causes that wake us up in the middle of the night. The theological question isn't how well you sleep or whether you wake up, but when you do wake up, to whom do you turn? Our worries and sorrows crush us if we are alone, but with God we find comfort and rest.

Stacey Reoach

In the meantime, God has a purpose in our sleeplessness. He can use our weakness to make us dependent on him, showing us his love and care with each passing minute of the day. He can use our weariness to push us to lean on him as the all-sufficient, all-wise, and all-powerful God, and to know that when we are weak with sleeplessness then we are strong in him.

Mark 4:35–41

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Ben Gladd

The flow of the narrative is jarring, since we expect Jesus to be awake in such dire circumstances. His behavior is also perplexing. You typically sleep because you're, well, tired, and this passage mentions nothing of the sort. Why is Jesus asleep?

Ben Gladd

What do we learn from this remarkable event in Jesus's life? We learn that Jesus is fully human, and as a human, he slept soundly during an attack, demonstrating perfect trust in his Father. This is the deepest sleep anyone has ever enjoyed. But Jesus isn't just any human; he slept like King David. We could even argue that Jesus slept better than King David because he possesses perfect trust in God in contrast to David's imperfect faith.

Akshay Rajkumar

In his darkest hours, Jesus stayed awake in anguish so he can give sleep and rest to those he loves (Ps. 127:2) . . . He offered himself in perfect submission on his sleepless night, so we can always have the assurance of his perfect love in ours.



Go to sleep. God is awake.

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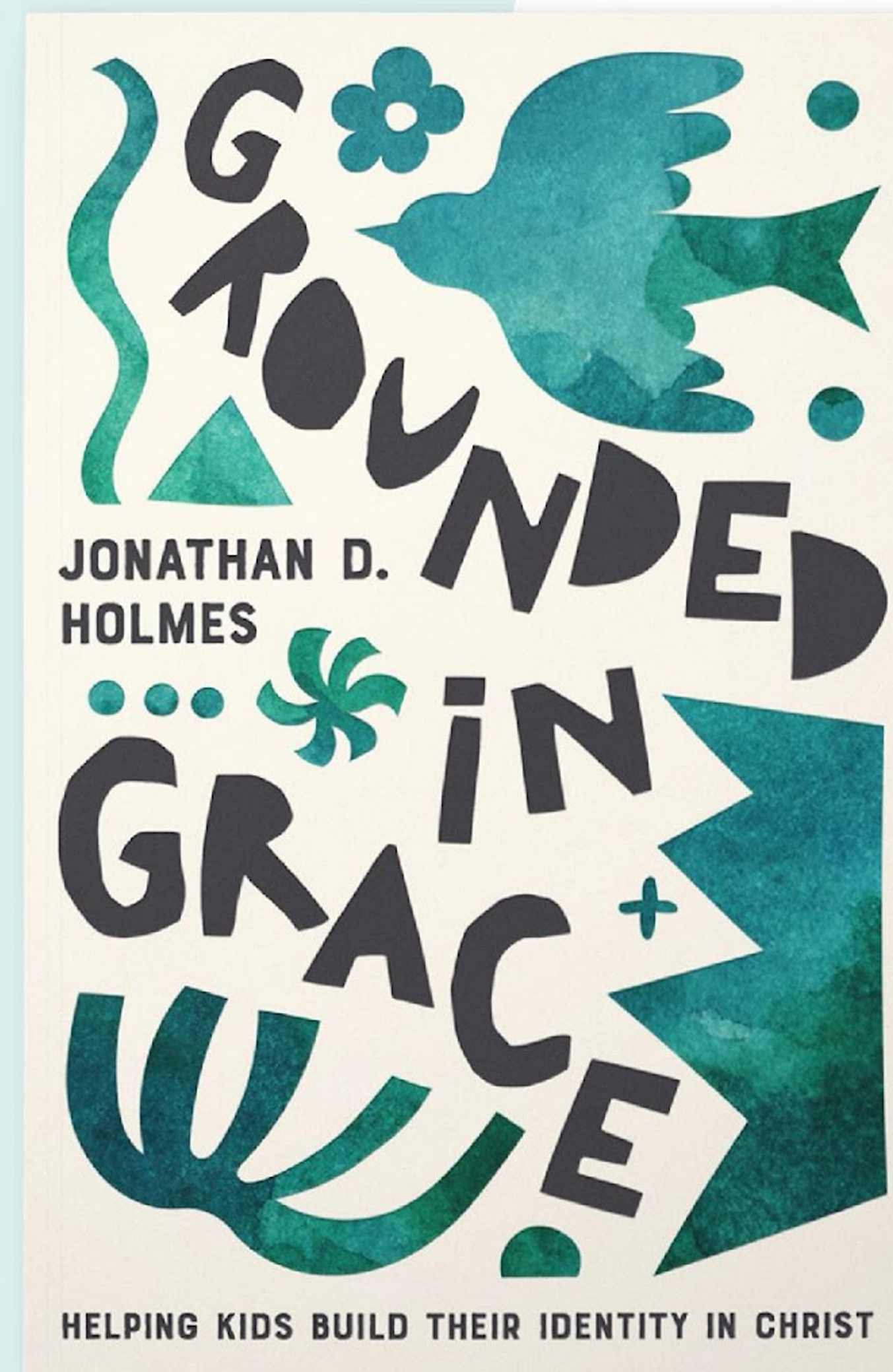


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