

Sunday, January 17, 2021

Psalms 91: 1-8 2 Timothy 1:3-7 Luke 6:6-16

Back on Track: Daily Steps to Begin a New Year

Night: Ending the Day with God

We are now in the middle of January and the polar vortex is coming! Winter weather is approaching and we will stay at home more! Well, with pandemic restrictions, I don't know how much more we can stay in our homes and of course there are no snow days for kids in school! Every day is an instruction day as they continue with online studies! So no snow days but maybe there will be time to play!

It is now mid January and I am hoping that you are continuing to build up relationships with others and are getting back on track as you refocus your life on what it means to live for Christ. We are reminded of what the prophet Jeremiah (15:19) wrote as a way of understanding our lives in relationship to God. He states, "If you return to me, I will restore you." We need to be restored as we grow in faith and as we seek God in our every day living. In these last weeks we have focused on what it means to get 'back on track towards building our relationship with God. We talked about what our mornings might involve before our day begins. Last week was the 5 D's of discipleship as we realize that our days are filled with opportunities to serve God in whatever task or job we are called to do. And today we focus on night. What is it that we should be doing as we move from work to home; from study to relaxation and enjoyment and then as we prepare to rest and sleep.

We don't often think about the night but this is the time when many people are fearful and afraid of what might happen, what could take place and even who or what is moving around out in the dark. There is a natural fear of not being able to see at night and for many children these fears are real. So what do we do to aid our children to prepare for a restful night's sleep? We share stories which calm the minds of fear. We might even sing bedtime songs or lullabies and as Jesus taught his disciples, we too are called to pray. But this is not just limited to children. The calming of the mind and heart is necessary for everyone to be able to have their body rest as the sun goes down and the stars come out to be seen.

So what is your evening routine? What do you do to calm yourself down and prepare for needed rest? For some people it is to watch tv- news and weather before sleep. Others it is to

read a book or novel. Still others it is just natural to get into bed, turn out the light and snore away!

There are many children's stories which help calm the minds of both the reader and the young listener. One such character is Scaredy Squirrel (by Melanie Watt) who is fearful of many things until he overcomes them with knowledge. At first, Scaredy never leaves his nut tree because it is way too dangerous out in the world. In the world, he could encounter tarantulas, green Martians or killer bees but if something does come into his tree he is well-prepared. His emergency kit includes antibacterial soap, Band-Aids and a parachute. But Scaredy Squirrel soon learns that the world is also filled with many beautiful things and eventually this little squirrel ventures out to discover his place in the world. Well at least until he realizes that there is a difference between day and night. His night fear is that he might have a bad dream where there could be ghosts, dragons, fairies, polka dot monsters and bats. So to combat this fear, he plans to stay up all night and to keep busy. His to do list includes counting stars, playing cymbals and taking up scrapbooking. However other squirrels notice that he is not doing so well during the day. He has little to no energy, is moody, confused, has hallucinations, is forgetful and seems to be drowsy. So how does Scaredy handle the fear of the night creatures in his dream? He discovers that other creatures like raccoons come out at night and live. He realizes that his bad dreams were in his imagination and nothing horrible happened at night.

But what about you? What do you do to prepare to get your beauty rest? Are you fearful of sleeping and having bad dreams? OR maybe you too try to stay up late in order to be so tired you'll sleep? Maybe you are older and know that you might have to get up in the night for washroom trips and then you find it difficult to sleep again because your mind starts to think about the next day. Or maybe you are fearful of the darkness that comes especially at this time of year when the nights seem so long. We should not be afraid to sleep or dream at night. Because there are also good dreams that come to us at night and we know this because there are stories which tell of these dreams. God and angels do speak to people in dreams which give direction for people's lives. So we too must be willing and ready to receive these ideas.

Our hope each evening should be to find rest and end each day with God. But what do we do? First of all we need to leave work at work. This we know is very difficult especially in these covid19 days when work, school and fun are all within the bounds of home for many people. It is difficult to turn off the computer from work only to turn it on for school. With many movies and programs now on YouTube or available through streaming services, the computer, once a tool only for computing, is still on. So how do we redefine work and when the day is

over? We might decide that the day is over when it is time to prepare for the night. So what should we do as we prepare to sleep? We need to take time to pray not just quick little prayers but offering to God different kinds of expressions from our hearts which reflect both the day that has passed and the night and day to come.

Psalm 91 reassures us of God's protection no matter the time of day or night. "You will not fear the terror of the night or the arrow that flies by day nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness or the destruction that wastes at noonday." There is nothing that will harm you, day or night because God is protecting you. God also wants you to fully rest and be at peace at night. For we read "It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil, for God gives sleep to his beloved." (Psalm 127), We all know that it is important to get good proper sleep for our overall health. This enables us to function better the next day in whatever we are called to do. What do we need to do?

With children we often read bedtime stories—nothing too scary or with evil fantasy but stories of life and love and good endings of 'happily ever after'. One of the worst things to do is to watch images of violence, or police reports before trying to sleep as we know that these do not lend itself to good rest. Adults might read a light novel or book for a set amount of time.

Then what might occur next is singing or humming songs with children. Songs they have learned or songs that you share which are not loud. Lullabies are often remembered long after a child grows older and they can sing themselves "Sleep my child and peace attend thee, all through the night." Other songs known as lullabies like "Rock a bye baby, in the treetop, when the wind blows the cradle will rock, when the bough breaks the cradle will fall, and down will come baby cradle and all." May not be the best word choice to sing before sleeping, but the melody does help. There are many songs of the faith that assure us of God's love and protection no matter the time of day or night- we might want to reflect on these. "Jesus loves me", "In the garden" reminds us that Jesus is with us 'and He walks with me and talks with me'; "Blessed assurance", and "Amazing Grace". These songs bring comfort and care as we calm our hearts and minds to turn away from the world outside to the world that God has created of which we are a part.

This leads us to prayer. Paul writing in his second letter to Timothy says, "I am grateful to God when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day... I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; this is the spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." Paul reminds Timothy about how he used to pray all the time

because God's spirit was in him. We too are to pray. IF we wish to get back on track it is imperative to pray as Jesus did.

In our reading from Luke's gospel Jesus has begun teaching and preaching about fasting and the Sabbath when he heals a man with a diseased hand. He caused the scribes and the Pharisees to squirm when they were asked whether it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath. They did not know how to answer. However, this was the beginning of watching Jesus' actions and conspiring against him. This was even before Jesus had chosen his disciples. When it was time to choose those with whom he would spend a lot of time, Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. And when day came it was then he called his followers and chose twelve to be apostles. He had prayed all night yet knew that God had helped him make decisions.

We are to get our rest and be blessed when we do sleep. One of the best nights to sleep is the night when you've changed the sheets and you have warmed up your pajamas in the dryer and you jump in and relax. But before you fall asleep one thing that adds to this and makes a good sleep even better- is to pray. And when we pray we should give thanks to God for all of his blessings. We should pray in thanksgiving that you have a healthy relationship with God and others. This means asking God to protect and guide you, to pray for health and healing, and to know that you will lie down and sleep in peace. Psalm 4 tells us that we will be safe in him and we will have gladness in our hearts.

But what do we say? We can share in the words learned as children: either version of the "Now I Lay Me" prayer: Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. Angels watch me through the night and wake me with the morning light. OR Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep, if I should die before I wake, I pray to God my soul to take" We then ask for God to bless those whom we know and love, those we care about and then continue on in prayers. Often one might also share in the words Jesus taught "Our Father,"

Ending your day with prayer enables you to rest. Jesus said, "Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30). When you are able to sleep you don't need to be afraid of anything, God is protecting you and watching over you because you are His and he is yours. Your relationship is building and growing because you have faith.

Ending your day with God means that instead of counting sheep to fall asleep, you need only to speak to Jesus, the Good Shepherd who looks after you now and always. Let us remember this as we get back on track with God- our creator, Jesus our teacher and the Spirit who stays with us always.

Let us pray.

God of love and hope, we praise you that when it is time to sleep we need only turn to you, to praise and offer our thanks. We may also share with you the concerns from the day so that we might fully rest and be prepared for the day to come. Bless us O God as we continue to get back on track and build in our relationship with you. Amen