

Problems Christians Face Tiredness

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New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Tiredness

Today's subject is tiredness. Tiredness is a normal part of life. We expend energy through different activities, and we need to rest to recover, and we need to sleep. Rest and sleep both address tiredness and are essential to our physical and mental health. But we can get over tired because we are over-committed or anxious. On the other hand, exercise strengthens our hearts and improves your blood circulation. This increased blood flow raises our oxygen levels in our bodies. All of this works to lower the risk of heart diseases. Exercise makes us tired, but it is good tiredness, and we quickly recover by resting. Sleeping and resting are effective in dealing with normal fatigue. Problems arise when we become overtired and cannot recover the energy we need to perform effectively.

Good sleep refreshes us physically and mentally and helps to do all the things we do more efficiently. During sleep, your brain is still working. It is sorting out the information we absorb throughout the day and developing our memory. Sleep is also essential to the body's process of repair and maintenance. It also relaxes our sympathetic nervous system and prepares it for the new day. During sleep, our immune system releases proteins enabling our bodies to act effectively against illness. Sleep is vital to our well-being, and when we sleep well, we feel better and manage our lives better. Assisting this is the periods of rest we also benefit from.

Today I want to explore how sleeping and resting address tiredness and see what spiritual lessons we can learn and helpfully apply to our Christian lives.

When you are asleep, your brain is sorting things out.

Sorting things out is a good thing to start with because God wants us to enjoy orderly lives. God taught Moses to live in a wilderness and then he used Him to guide an emerging nation through the wilderness. Samuel had his circuit of ministry through which he judged Israel. David learnt to trust God through the discipline of being a shepherd, and God chose him to shepherd a nation. Look at the life of Daniel and trace the orderliness of his diet and prayer life. These were the foundation of a life through which he advised and guided the great monarchs he served. As Christians, we need to live orderly lives. In the New Testament, Paul outlines the character of elders and deacons. Their lives had to demonstrate self-control and their families welfare.

The Christian life is not to be careless and inconsistent. Irresponsibility and inconsistency, create stress and conflict, wearing us down and making us overtired. As single people or couples, we should organise our lives. To do this, we need to breakdown our responsibilities and activities and review how we are spending our time. Whenever we are clearing out our garage or the spare room, we always start with three piles; the things we will keep, the things we will dispose of; and the things we are not sure about. The first two sort themselves out and we can concentrate on the last pile! To some people, orderliness is tedious and unexciting. I don't think Moses, Samuel, Ra-

hab, Ruth, David, Daniel, Esther and Paul lived dull and unexciting lives and I do know that orderliness is the friend of peace, contentment and restfulness.

When my wife, June, was a little girl, her mum had a thrift box. You don't see them very often these days. They were made of tin and had several compartments and slots in the lid, so you could place money inside. They also had labels like gas, electricity etc. They were used to put aside money for the different bills when families had tight budgets, and money had to be used very carefully. On June's mum's thrift box, the first label was LM. One day June asked her mum, who had a large family, what LM meant. Her mum told her it stood for "Lord's Money." Every week she put aside money for different expenses and the first money she set aside was funding for the Lord's work.

The first thing we need to do when we consider how to organise our lives is to ask, "Does the Lord have the first place?" If we give him the first place, we will discover everything else will gradually fall into place:

"Seek first the kingdom of God...and all these things [will] be added unto you"
(Matthew 6:33).

When you are asleep, the body is repairing and maintaining itself.

Different hormones are released during sleep, these have specific purposes in the repair and maintenance of our bodies. So it would seem sensible in our waking hours to ensure we monitor our spiritual repair and maintenance needs. This is an essential process in engineering. Things are checked at regular intervals, and parts are replaced to ensure everything is kept in perfect working order. That's why we service our cars and our gas boilers to avoid a major breakdown. We can relate this to our spiritual lives. We maintain our fellowship with God by daily seeking His presence through His word and through prayer. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16,

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

The word of God acts as our repair and maintenance system. When machinery is maintained correctly, repairs are minimised and serious breakdowns prevented. It is the same with our lives. God's word highlights issues early enabling us to be corrected and guided. Maintenance prevents machinery from being stressed and overworked. In the same way, the word of God works to equip us to face the pressures and anxieties of life through prayer and dependence on the Lord. This in turn brings a peacefulness to our activities,

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"
(Philippians 4:6-7).

When you are asleep, you are relaxing.

During sleep, we relax. We need to rest during our waking moment as well. Some Christians feel guilty about relaxing. David writes in Psalm 23,

He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul" (verses 2-3).

Psalm 46:10 teaches us to,

"Be still and know that I am God."

At the beginning of Mark chapter 6, the Lord sent out His twelve disciples two by two on a preaching and healing mission. Later in the chapter (verse 30), they return and tell the Lord what they had done. It is then the Lord says to them,

“Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest awhile” (v.31).

In this verse, the Lord describes His concern that we build into our lives times for reflection and rest through which we are re-energised to continue to serve Him more effectively.

The Lord sent His disciples out in twos. In the service of God, fellowship is vital. We should complement each other as we serve and use our abilities and gifts in harmony. Natural abilities include, amongst other things, leadership qualities, strength, problem solving and friendliness. These abilities need to be sanctified and brought under the Lordship of Christ. In this way, natural skills can be used spiritually. We also have spiritual gifts which are given to us to fulfil our place in the body of Christ. Both need to be used selflessly to glorify God in reaching out with the Gospel and building up the people of God. The other benefit of serving together is that we share the workload. This reduces tiredness but requires grace and humility. Sometimes in the service of God, we can jealously guard what we consider to be our service and be unwilling to include others. On the other hand, we may feel overburdened and would love to have others help, but support is not forthcoming.

It is not a weakness to explain that you are overburdened. The Lord teaches us that it is necessary to spiritual service that we pause to consider the work we are involved in, reflect on what we have done and seek His guidance and blessing for the future. Today the word “furlough” is in everyday use. It means “leave of absence.” It is a word which I first learned as a young Christian to describe the times when missionaries returned to their own countries for a period. Universities have sabbaticals when every seven years a lecturer is given a year to pursue other studies, or write or travel. This came from Leviticus 25 when God ensured the land had to rest. We still refer to fallow land where land is not farmed but rested and then reused. God Himself rests after His work of creation. Reflection and rest are not unproductive but essential to healthy spiritual growth and fruitful service. They are crucial to ensuring we are not overtired and in danger of being worn out.

If we do not build in this principle of spiritual reflection and rest leading to rejuvenation, we suffer. Our service can become sterile, and we can find ourselves driven by duty, not love. If our days are filled with a frenzy of activity, we will burn out, the burden we carry will become too great for us, and we may breakdown. There is a vital connection between Psalm 23, verse 1 and verses 2 and 3. David did not lack anything because the Lord taught Him to lie down and drink beside still waters. This was the basis of being re-energised, restored and of being led in paths of righteousness. He had to learn to be still to know how to be active. May we listen to the Lord’s invitation to make time to “Come aside by yourself to a deserted place and rest a while.” And discover in our daily experience the peace of His presence, our burdens lifted, vision refocussed, spirits refreshed and restored so that we can better serve the Saviour in happy fellowship.

When you are asleep, you are being prepared for the next day.

Levels of cortisol, often called the stress hormone, decrease during the first few hours of sleep before rising to a peak soon after waking up. This helps makes you feel ready to face the day, switches on your appetite and you are ready to go. It is essential to plan and prepare for things. Of course, there will always be things that surprise us, but if we plan ahead for those things, we expect we live a more settled, peaceful and less tiring life and are well prepared for the unexpected.

Daniel is an excellent example of how to prepare, act and reflect on the business of life. He served in the highest office, but he ensured that his days were governed, not by the kings he served, but by the God he worshipped. The fact that he was exiled from his homeland changed nothing.

Whatever his circumstances, in the palace or in the lions' den, he lifted his heart to God in prayer. We read,

“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days” (Daniel 6:10).

I doubt there were many people as busy as Daniel was, but he made time to be in the presence of God. I always like to think that he began by preparing for the day. He paused in the middle of the day for strength and guidance in the actions he took. Finally, he reflected on what he had done committing himself to God with a thankful heart at the end of the day. For all the weight of his responsibility, I don't get the feeling Daniel ever had a bad night's sleep.

When you are asleep you dream.

While asleep, you have periods of non-rapid eye movement sleep (NREM) and rapid eye movement sleep (REM). It's during REM sleep that we have the most vivid dreams. During this stage, your muscles are temporarily paralysed, meaning you can't move. Some scientists think this might be so that you don't physically act out your dreams. Your mind is going through a sorting out process and preparing for the next day. It is helpful for us to sort things out. It is essential to reflect on the direction we are taking in our lives and prayerfully consider the paths we are walking down. Psalm 23 refers to this,

“He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake” (Psalm 23:3).

Resting and reflecting are restorative processes, and when we undertake these in dependence upon God He leads us “in paths of righteousness.” This is important. Every true Christian wants to be directed in the will of God. David writes about “For his name's sake.” We talk about the Christian pathway, which embraces all the people of God. On this road, we all have the specific path down which God would take us to fulfil His will in our lives and bless us in doing so. Sometimes we do this as individuals, and sometimes we rest and reflect in fellowship with others.

Associated with this process is vision. What is it that God is seeking to accomplish in my life? What tasks has he laid before me? Our lives can become so overwhelmed by diverse and demanding activities which drain our energy and make us tired. We can be swept along by this busyness and become captive to the cycle of demands which rule our lives. We have to break into this process by creating time to rest and reflect upon God's will for our lives.

When you are asleep, your immune system acts to protect your health.

While you're sleeping, your immune system releases small proteins. If you're sick or injured, these proteins help your body fight inflammation, infection and trauma. Without enough sleep, your immune system might not be able to function at its best.

We need to repair things. I am old enough to remember when my Grandmother used to knit woollen socks. And I can also recall warm winter nights sitting quietly beside a roaring coal fire watching my Grandmother repairing or darning woollen socks which had holes. She used to say “There's no shame in a darned sock.” In Mark 1:19-20 we read,

“When He (Jesus) had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. And immediately He called them.”

Fishing is hard, backbreaking and tiring work, but to be a successful fisherman you need good nets and to take care of them. When the Lord called James and John, they were not fishing, they were repairing their nets. They took care of what their livelihoods depended on. In our anxiety to be active, let us not forget to quietly ensure we are equipped for the work we are called to do. Let us make sure we are not fishing with broken nets. Preparation for work removes much of the stress of work, and calmness reduces tiredness.

The other day I had to go out for an appointment. On the way back, I popped into the local supermarket to get some groceries. As I got to the checkout, I realised I had forgotten to pick up my wallet. The lady at checkout was very understanding. She tilled everything and arranged for me to pick them up at the service desk. But I still had to drive home, pick up my wallet, drive back up to the supermarket pick up the groceries and then go home again. This was all because I didn't pause and plan my journey and make sure I had everything I needed. Rushing creates pressure and makes demands on us, and we become stressed and wearied. We never read of the Lord rushing anywhere. His life was paced. He still worked hard, sometimes to the point of exhaustion but not because He rushed things but because He sacrificed.

When tiredness overcomes us.

There are times when exhaustion and tiredness legitimately overcome us, and we need to rest. But this should be unusual not our constant experience. We have an example of this in the life of the Lord Jesus in Mark 4:36-41. It is a beautiful revelation of Jesus as the Son of Man experiencing exhaustion and then of the Son of God in His deity and power over His creation stilling the storm. The Lord's experience of tiredness enabled Him to sympathise with us when we are exhausted. But it doesn't mean He wants us to be permanently tired. We present ourselves to God as living sacrifices, but that doesn't mean we are in a permanent state of exhaustion.

On a practical level, we can avoid extreme tiredness by not burning the candle at both ends and wasting our energy. Our energy is a resource, and we are to use it wisely. Think of your discipleship as a marathon, it's a race that is long, it is not a sprint. Marathon runners pace their running, and at the end of a race, they have the energy for a burst of speed if needed. If we have to get up early for work, it is not wise to keep late nights. Discipline involves making decisions not only about what we do but about the energy and the commitment to do it. The Lord talks about counting the cost. We can have vision, but we will fail to accomplish it if spiritual energy is lacking, and we have not counted the cost and paced ourselves.

Tried hands and tired knees.

What do we do when we feel past ourselves and exhausted? Hebrew 12 helps us. In verses 1 and 2 we read,

“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”

Notice the simplicity of these encouraging words, “lay aside.” Athletes don't carry excess weights but have a single purpose in view to finish the race. As Christians, we run looking up, not around. We fix our eyes on the Lord and follow Him applying His ministry to our lives. We consider the example of His life to remove weariness and weakness.

In verses 12 and 13 we read,

“Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.”

A picture is painted of inactivity and weakness. The hands are not engaged in work, and the knees are not able to lift heavy loads. Have you ever watched those extraordinary athletes called weight-lifters? Their backs and knees are always supported to strengthen them as they lift weights the human body was not designed to lift. Our knees are essential for lifting heavy weights. They illustrate spiritual weakness. We are encouraged to “strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees”. How do we do this? By lifting up holy hands (1 Timothy 2:8) in prayer and bowing down on our knees in prayer to become “strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Ephesians 6:10). In doing so, we find at the throne of grace, “mercy and grace to help in a time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). And we are enabled to walk the straight path of discipleship and pursue peace and holiness.

We have some vivid illustrations of disciples being so tired they fell asleep at critical times. Tiredness does not only rob us of energy; it can also rob us of blessing. The New Testament records Peter sleeping on three occasions. The first time, alongside his two friends James and John, he fell asleep on the Mount of Transfiguration. The Lord had taken them up to the mountain to see His glory, and they fell asleep. On the second occasion, the Lord Jesus took the three friends with Him to the Garden of Gethsemane. He wanted them to be with Him in His hour of greatest need, and they fell asleep. I have to ask myself how often I am asleep to the sufferings and glory of the Lord Jesus. If my tiredness is causing me to lose interest in my spiritual welfare or, more importantly, I lose fellowship with the Lord, I am on dangerous ground.

Happily, Peter woke up and in his two letters written by the power of the Spirit of God towards the end of his life, Peter writes of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow (1 Peter 1:11). As if it was yesterday, he remembers that he and his friends “were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16). He tells us that the Lord Jesus “received from God the Father honour and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased’” (2 Peter 1:17). Peter was wide awake to the sufferings and glories of Christ.

On the third occasion, when Peter slept, he was in prison, bound in chains between two soldiers and with two sentries at the door, on the eve of his planned execution. He was so soundly asleep the angel had to strike him to wake him up! Peter was the man who discovered his utter weakness when accused of being a disciple of Jesus. But in prison, he no longer rested on his own resources. Peter rested in Christ’s love and the grace which kept him all the days of his life. He was in the eye of a storm of persecution, which cost his dear friend, James, his life, but Peter slept under the wings of the Saviour who he now trusted utterly. I have no doubt James had the same experience.

Why does the Lord record these extraordinary events for us? He encourages us to know His love and grace in the storms of life and the peace of the One “under whose wings (we) have come for refuge” (Ruth 2:12).

One of the most helpful Scriptures in connection with tiredness is Matthew 11:28 where the Lord says,

“Come unto me, all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

The place we find rest and the wisdom to pace our lives is in Christ. We often limit these verses to the Gospel, and they are powerful words to those who need to find the Saviour. But these words of the Lord should continuously guide us on our pathway of faith. We first need to recognise the condition we are in and to come to the Saviour. We always need spiritual honesty to accept where we are and come to the Saviour as we are. He asks us to take His yoke. Yokes seem to us confining and restrictive, and they represent hard work. But it is the reverse. Our tiredness and exhaustion confine and restrict or lives not allowing us to live the abundant life we have in Christ. His yoke

brings us close to Him, and we begin to move at the pace of the Saviour having His company and His guidance. His yoke is easy, or kindly it is the same word as in Ephesians 4:32,

“And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

And His burden is light because He helps us to carry it. It is the fellowship of Christ that is needed to bring us into a place of calm, peaceful and fulfilling service.

We learned that resting in the Lord is not inactivity but the basis of true and effective service. We are enabled to walk and not be fatigued. Walking faithfully with the Lord gives us the energy to serve God (see Luke 24:33). The Old Testament confirms this teaching,

“But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

On many occasions, I have seen paragliders in Switzerland soaring above the Alps. They start by laying out their parachutes. Then they walk towards a mountain edge. Next, they run, and finally, they fly. Sometimes they take one passenger with them to experience the joy of flight. It takes a lot of courage to run off the side of a mountain with a stranger!

But our Christian experience is not the same, because God works differently. First, God is not a stranger, and He doesn't start from the ground, but from heaven. He takes us up into His presence to see things from where He is. Flying is the first thing we do. I remember the first time I saw a bald eagle in America soaring above the lake where we were sailing. They can see a rabbit clearly from two miles away. Coming into the presence of God to enjoy communion with Him through prayer and reading His word gives us a new view from heaven. This view includes the vastness of the whole counsel and the purposes of God. From this high place, God gives us the daily encouragement and guidance we need to walk with Him in all the practical details of our lives. At the end of Deuteronomy, in chapter 34, God took Moses to mount Nebo to show him the whole of the Promised Land. God can take our breath away with the scale and majesty of His counsels. But He also overwhelms us by the interest and care He has in our lives.

In God's presence, we begin to understand God's greatness and God's nearness. His word provides us with clarity and focus, helping us to understand His will and the direction He wants us to take. We are empowered and inspired to run and not be tired. Spiritual energy and fruitfulness come from communion with Christ. The Lord Jesus makes this clear in John 15:5,

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

Jesus provides all that is needed to follow and serve Him. The Lord was characterised by His service, which brought pleasure to the Father's heart. We are to have the same willingness to serve:

“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17).

We are also enabled to walk and not be fatigued. Walking faithfully with God gives us the energy to serve God (see Luke 24:33). Tiredness is replaced by the evenness of walking with God and in communion with the Father and Son by the Holy Spirit's power, seeing things from heaven, we serve with full hearts and learn to become like our Lord.

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