

My small group and I set out on an adventure—we're looking at the spiritual disciplines and how they help us to live life fully. Fully with God and fully with one another. We're using a book by James Bryan Smith called *The Good and Beautiful God: Falling in Love with the God Jesus Knows*, and when my friend Stephanie cracked the spine to have a look at the contents she nearly fainted with relief. Stephanie's a mom of two busy boys under the age of six, and helps her husband Kirby run a business in her "spare time." She doesn't have a lot of room—in her heart or her schedule—to add more guilt-inducing spiritual "to do"s.

Why did Stephanie laugh in joy after scanning the first chapter? Well, our first assignment on the road to sainthood is, wait for it, to go to sleep.

That's right. In setting out a life fully alive to God and His Church, the first exercise to undertake was to sleep for a minimum of 10 hours, and, ideally, to sleep until you got sick of being in bed.

Many of us react to this exercise with incredulity. What could sleep possibly have to do with living a more holy life? Shouldn't we be reading our Bible more or learning contemplative prayer or visiting prisoners with encouraging words?

While those things are a part of living a Kingdom-shaped life, our hurried and harried lifestyles make them a nearly impossible place to start. Often, when we set out to do these things, we're setting ourselves up for failure, because we haven't grasped a basic truth:

God is *good*.

God is *so* good, in fact, that He's actually got it all covered. Truly. He doesn't need our help, and He doesn't need us to run ourselves ragged in attempts to gain His love.

Instead, what He does need is for us to slow down a little. As we rush from activity to activity, surviving with, on average, less than 7 hours of sleep a night, we're only proving that we think ourselves indispensable and God a cruel task-master in the sky.

We're also ignoring our bodies and their very real needs. Human beings aren't souls in bodies. We are souls *and* bodies, and how we treat ourselves physically is a reflection of the state of our souls. We can't abuse our bodies and expect to grow spiritually.

Sleep is an act of surrender. It's a beautiful co-mingling of effort and grace. You can't will yourself to sleep (as many insomniacs know), but you can put yourself in the place of receiving it. You can't force yourself into restfulness, but you can accept the gift when it comes to you.

So, our assignment for our first week was to sleep. We were to get help if we needed to—with the kids or other responsibilities—and either sleep until we couldn't sleep any more (which for some of us would be a long time) or sleep more than seven hours a night for

three consecutive nights. To Stephanie, it sounded like a luxury, a treat. To God, it sounds like the right order of things—His children relaxing into His care and provision.

It may not sound like a spiritual question, but the next time you see your friend in the grocery store or your (gasp) pastor in church, you might ask how much sleep he's getting. Exhaustion is the number one enemy of spiritual formation. If we aren't choosing to rest, we aren't choosing for God.

So, tonight, get a good night's rest. Thank God that you *aren't* God, and that His love and His power are sufficient to see you through the night, and prepare you for the next day.

*I will lie down and sleep in peace for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety. – Ps. 4:8*