

Can You Recover Lost Sleep? Of Course.

It happens almost weekly these days. Either by reasonable life circumstance or by me just being irresponsible, I will go a night with only four or five hours of sleep. And then the next day I feel like a zombie. I may grab some coffee or I may grab an apple, but more than anything I long for one thing: more sleep.

And some days, that is exactly what I get. It is never right away but I get it eventually, either in the form of a nap or going to bed an hour or two earlier the following night. Or as in the case of a couple of people I know, several extra hours on Friday night/Saturday morning.

When I mention in conversation that I can't wait to catch up on missed sleep, I am often met with a response that is accompanied by the same disdain I have for people when they bash Chic-Fil-A: "What? You can't catch up on lost sleep!" And with the tone of voice I would add the following implied message: "Are you some kind of anti-science idiot?"

I really have never understood this response. Because my counter-response is that I do catch up on sleep. It really is that simple.

I'll spare you the links to articles on this topic. I've read a bunch of them and they typically agree with me in the sense that you can recover sleep *in the short term*, which is really my point. I have never tried to argue that I can recover anything from all of those sleepovers I had as a child in the '80s where we barely slept. I only claim that lost sleep within a day or two, or a week at most, can at times easily be recovered.

But I don't make this claim based on science. To me, it's

basic common sense. When I sleep eight hours several nights in a row, I typically wake up refreshed and not longing for sleep (though I may want to stay in bed due to being comfortable, warm and/or lazy). When I get five hours of sleep, I wake up wanting more. And all day I feel it. My body screams that it needs more sleep and if possible I will get it as soon as possible. I often say that if it comes down to reality and common sense vs. science, I'm going with reality. It's why that it may be technically true that snow "makes it warmer," in Chicago quite often it will be 47 degrees one day and the next it will snow and be 27 (which is exactly what happened this week as I type this). On those days, "science" doesn't mean a thing. The snow in my reality made it colder. But this topic isn't even that similar. The science, while unsettled, isn't hardcore against me.

Let me be clear about something else that causes confusion: When I say I *can* recover lost sleep, this does not mean that I *have to*. There have been many times I have slept 4-5 hours or less and within the next week I could not find a time to get it back and at that point maybe it is lost forever (though I would never argue that there is some hard and fixed point that you can pass where sleep is no longer recoverable).

What happens as a result? I'm not sure. I can only guess. Maybe it makes me more susceptible to illness. Maybe it just makes me crankier than normal. Maybe it means nothing. I don't know. I just know that if I can recover it I will. But life is too complex with ministry, marriage and heavy mental activity to allow it to always be possible. Often the very thing that kept me up all night the previous night will have my brain in such a high gear for several days that trying to nap is useless. I just have to deal with the fatigue and possible long term affects of sleep deprivation.

That's my dos centavos on the subject. What do you think?

