A few days ago I updated my “status” on Facebook with a comment regarding my having been very busy and finding myself very tired and considering a nap later on. A friend responded saying, “Napping is a spiritual discipline... you may quote me, – Phil Foster.” Now, Phil is a good friend and has spent many hours with me discussing spirituality and where we are in our daily ways of being, so this response didn’t surprise me one bit. The comment, though, began a thought trail.

Are you aware that sleep deprivation is a form of torture?

Are you aware that children actually grow as they sleep?

Are you aware that our bodies heal themselves as we sleep?

We are created in God’s image. God stopped long enough in the creation process to rest and reflect on what God had just done—each day—so why do we find it so difficult to do the same thing?

As caregivers, it is essential that we get enough sleep. Having a good night’s sleep keeps our emotions balanced, our bodies ready, and our minds sharp: all aspects of being a great caregiver!

In previous spiritual practices columns I’ve shared the benefits of a nightly ritual of examen as a way of releasing emotions which have “settled” in during the day. Our joys and praises can keep us awake just as our concerns and anxieties. Following a day full of pleasant and enjoyable happenings, have you ever found yourself unable to stop going over them? Reviewing them, getting as much out of the memory as out of the actual experience? Yet, being unable to shut that off in order to allow our brains to relax and ease into sleep is just as frustrating as worrying over how to pay the power bill or the mortgage or keep the kids in school.

Turning our thoughts “off” can be difficult; however, there are several possibilities for helping ourselves do just that. Maintaining the space within our bedrooms as relaxing and inviting is one step. Inside this issue, we are introducing a new contributor—Lalah Manly—who will be providing a regular column on parenting. Her first column deals with the benefits of sleep and how she discovered the benefits to parenting of a good night’s rest.

Other ways of releasing our joys and concerns are through prayer, journaling, or simply making a list. Giving our thoughts a concrete avenue out of our heads will most times provide enough room for sleep to slip inside.

Simple relaxation exercises such as deep, slow breathing while contracting and relaxing our large muscle groups from our feet up to our faces bring much needed oxygen and distraction into the picture and will oftentimes provide just the relief needed to fall asleep. And...don’t forget a cup of warm milk.

If you have consistent trouble falling asleep and resting well, don’t hesitate to speak with your doctor about it during your next visit.

Restfully yours ~ Rev. Daphne Reiley
EXQUISITE SELF-CARE ~ LALAH MANLY

Why, hello! My name Lalah (“Layla”), and I’m an ordinary mom of one (if there is such a thing). I haven’t yet hit my mid-life crisis (though there are small existential puddles forming around my feet these days), I work full time in the schools with young children, and I’m a parent coach on the side. Nature, nurture, Myers Briggs typology or fate, I am pulled forward by my navel into a desire for children to be parented by adults with inner resources. Which means that I harp a lot on self-care.

I was 6 months out of my coach training when I finally began implementing pieces of an "exquisite self-care plan" for myself. It was becoming clear my long term goals were not within reach without some changes in how I conduct my daily life. Namely, I needed more sleep. I am, however, a person with Projects. I approach these with the most focus in the evening once my son, 5, is in bed, but if giving head to my natural propensities, I'll stay up past midnight working them through. Because I was routinely overtired, my parenting was impacted right along with my energy for pursuing joy.

So, I began to approach sleep with my favorite strategy: the incremental step. What is the smallest possible movement forward? Susan Ariel Rainbow Kennedy, of PlanetSARK, calls these micromovements, completely do-able steps in the right direction that, when they accumulate, mean progress. (There is genius in bold stroke action as well, but I regularly accomplish a lot more by starting small, especially when skeptical or scared.)

My first step toward more sleep was making my bed in the morning. A 60-second task. Doing so meant there would be a welcoming spot to turn to in the evening. Another was to promise myself I’d only read books in bed I authentically enjoy, regardless of subject, genre or style. And then, I set myself the task of getting to bed "on time" for just 5 nights in a row. I got support and accountability by posting my steps on Facebook, but the real feedback was internal. I experienced perhaps my first work week ever in which I arrived at Friday with energy to spare for my family. I still remember the shock of it. It was only then that I began to understand the deep wisdom of self-care. When my needs on the first rung of Abraham Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs” were met, I found a surprising wellspring of joy from which to serve. Maslow says we need our basic, physical needs met first before we can begin to think about our needs for safety, love, self-esteem, or self-actualization; each layer must be fulfilled before we can consider the next layer. If we want to be effective, productive care givers, we must see that our needs are met from the bottom of the hierarchy up.

If there are others depending on you, the best gift you can give them is to care as fully as possible for your own needs. Is there an incremental step in the right direction that you could take today? Whether it’s making yourself a cup of tea or dancing to music you love, consider doing something that brings more life into your system, and then watch for ripples.
WHERE TO FIND HELP . . .

Area Agency on Aging, Atlanta Regional Commission: 404-463-3524
This number can open doors and windows to help and relief; to education and information. When you have a question or need to talk, feel free to call. The folks at the Area Agency on Aging will work to connect you with who and what you need.

Alzheimer’s Association Helpline: 1-800-272-3900, Available 24 hours a day / 7 days a week
Check the Alzheimer’s Association in Georgia’s website for classes and workshops in your area dealing with caregiving in general as well as for those living with dementia. http://www.alz.org/georgia/

First Christian Church of Decatur (Disciples of Christ): 404-378-3621 or 770-366-1206
The Caregiver Spiritual Support Ministry of our church will be happy to listen and support you and your care-receiver as well as assist you in finding information appropriate to your needs.

Trinity Baptist Church: Center for Caregiver Spirituality: 770-922-8944
The Center for Caregiver Spirituality, a ministry of Trinity Baptist Church in Conyers, Georgia, provides peer support groups and individual spiritual direction and support. Check the ministry website at http://www.caregiverspirituality.com.

HOW TO HELP . . .

Techniques and Tips For
Safely Companioning the Mobility-Challenged
Saturday, May 7, 2011
9:00 am until Noon
Workshop Lead by a Licensed Practical Nurse

Do you have a loved-one who needs assistance rising from a sofa or a chair, moving from sitting on the bed to a wheelchair? Is your back aching after a day of caring for your mobility-challenged spouse, parent, child, or friend?

Come learn how to safely assist someone in moving from a seated position to standing as well as other situations. Learn how to safely companion someone using a walker.

Workshop is free and open to the public and is sponsored by:

First Christian Church of Decatur
(Disciples of Christ)

Right at Home
In Home Care & Assistance

For more information and directions to First Christian Church of Decatur, call 770-378-3621 (main office) or 770-366-1206 (Rev. Daphne Reiley, Director of Caregiver Spiritual Support).
UPCOMING EVENTS OF NOTE:

May 1st; 4:30pm  
**Vespers Worship Service (Tucker)**  
Northlake Gardens Assisted Living  
1300 Montreal Road  
Tucker, Georgia  
770-934-0034 for directions/details

May 7th; 9:00am-noon  
**Techniques and Tips for Safely Companioning the Mobility-Challenged**  
First Christian Church of Decatur  
Workshop for caregivers and their friends. Free and open to the public.  
770-378-3621 for directions/details

May 17th; 7:00pm  
**Caregiver Support Group (Lilburn)**  
770-822-8832 for directions/details

Advertisements: Services for Caregivers & Their Families

Spend your time caring, not caregiving.

Do you have a business that would be helpful for Caregivers and their families? Advertising in *The Caregiver's Newsletter* introduces Caregivers and their families to your services and helps to support this caring ministry in Decatur and the surrounding area. Contact Daphne Reiley at 770-366-1206 for more information.