

“My Night: Ending My Day with God”
by Rom A. Pegram (9/24/17)

Welcome back to our early fall worship series—BACK ON TRACK! You may be wondering what I’m doing with this tooth brush up here this morning; I’m not going to brush my teeth in the pulpit. *I’ve already done that this morning; thank you very much!* But I do call it to your attention because ... there’s a purpose behind it. I’m going to get to that in a few minutes but I’ll just say, we’ve got a surprise for you today—later...

As I start, I also just want to re-emphasize that ... *today is the day*. If you’re a little off-track in your relationship with God, *today is the day*. This is the time to get ‘back on track’ in your walk with God. If summer has ‘derailed’ you just a bit and things are a little out-of-sink in your spiritual life, the GOOD NEWS is ... *God is a God who is willing to meet you right where you are*. And while you’re getting back on track in other areas of your life (i.e. school, etc.), now’s the time to get ‘back on track’ with God, too! So ... let’s go to our key verse—once again—and read this promise together. This is from Jeremiah 15:19 (NLT). Here we go...

“...If you return to me, I will restore you....”

If you return to me, God says, “I will restore you.” Again, we’re not necessarily talking about major adjustments, but small steps we can take in our lives to walk closer to God. These are daily steps we can take, in four key areas of our lives, that will help us align our lives with God once again...

A couple weeks ago, we covered our mornings—getting ‘back on track’ with God in our morning routine. Last week, we looked at our days—our work days in particular, to see if they’re unfolding in a way that honors God. And today, we get to the third key area of our life where we need to get ‘back on track’ with God—our evenings...

Right now, I’d like you to pull out your message notes (bulletin) and look at them with me—especially the graphic at the top of the page. I’ve been giving you a ‘word for the week’ each time we’ve met for this series. Week one (upper right hand, under the Bible) was ‘Priority’. Week two, last week (lower right, under the computer), was ‘Mission’. And this week’s word (lower left, under the praying hands) is ... “Rest”. Doesn’t that sound good?

So, how do you get ‘back on track’ with God in your evening—learning to end your day with God? It’s hard, isn’t it? It’s easy for our evenings to get off-track; if a morning’s off-track, that affects the rest of the day—including our work. And the craziness of a day *without* God can flow right into the evening too. Do these sound familiar?

- You’re about to work out the door at work, and your boss says, “Not so fast, my friend. We’ve got a project that’s due tomorrow. I need you to stay and complete it.” Two and a half hours later, your night is off-track... Or...
- It’s a weeknight, but you thought it’d be fun to hang out with friends. You were just gonna hang out for a while—not knowing you’d be out ‘til 1 AM; now your night’s off-track ... and the alarm’s goes off at 5 AM... Or...

- You sit down on the couch, and you're just like "I'm gonna pick up my phone, and I'm gonna look at Facebook for just a moment." Two and half hours later, your night's off-track... You get the idea...

Listen, some things you can't help. They just happen. It's part of life. But, if they happen *all* the time, *pretty soon your nights become stressful, instead of restful*. And here's the thing about an off-track evening: You'll end your day exhausted and empty. Many times, you haven't given God a thought all evening long...

Did you know that 40% of Americans don't get enough sleep at night? And 60 million of us have insomnia. In other words, we're trying to go to bed at night, but we lie awake worrying about the day, worrying about all the things going on in our life. We have fatigue and anxiety, because we don't really know how to end our day ... in peace. But, folks, I'm here to tell you ... *God has a different plan for you! God wants to give you ... REST!* Again, that's our 'word for the day'. And that's a key to getting your evenings 'back on track' with God. You see, when we end our day the right way, when we learn to end our day *with* God, and *God promises he'll give us the rest we need*—to refresh us!

Let me ask you right now: Most of your evenings ... *are they restful? Or are they stressful?* Here's what God wants for you (Psalms 127:2, NLT): "It is useless for you to go to work so hard, from early morning until late at night, anxiously working for food to eat. God gives rest." God's desire for you is rest ... and you can find *real* rest when you learn to end your day with God. Here're some steps for you: *To find rest, first...*

I LEAVE MY WORK AT WORK. That sounds easy, doesn't it? But the truth is, *it's not so easy ... to leave work at work!* For many, we often take our work home with us. Now, I'm not saying neglect your work or you shouldn't work hard at our jobs; we should work hard—with integrity & excellence, remember? But, when we leave work, we need to disconnect; we should find ways to leave our work there...

In Colossians 3:23, Paul reminds us, "Work willingly, at whatever you do, as though you are working for the Lord, rather than for people." We looked at that verse last week; Paul is saying here to work with an attitude of willingness always; you're focused, you're working hard; and you're doing it all as if your life depended on it—for God. You're 'the one who' ... always works hard, but *we need to learn to leave it there...*

The problem is, *it's not always possible to finish our work!* Always one more phone call... One more email... Or our boss comes up, just before we're to leave, and says, "Hey, can you do one more thing for me?" So, it's not always possible (and for some, I know you have jobs where you're on call after regular work hours). But, what *can* you do? What *can* you do to leave work at work? Here're some simple suggestions of how to leave work at work—to finish everything you possibly can while still at work. First...

Plan out your next day ... before you leave work. Many of us, especially at the end of a work day, just rush out without a thought about the next day; but, is that wise ... or does that just add to our stress? *What if you took 15 minutes at the end of your day ... to plan your next day?* Look at what you accomplished today; maybe something didn't quite get done and you'll have to finish it tomorrow; take a moment and actually write that down—in order of importance. So, when you leave work, you're won't have to

worry about the next day; you've already planned for that before you left work. Or, how 'bout this...

Use the commute home ... to shift your focus to God. The truth is, when we're busy at work, sometimes God's the last thing on our mind, so we might need to make that transition. *If you're gonna find rest in God, you have to shift your focus and attention to God,* so while on your commute: Listen to the Bible (audio) or Christian podcasts/books ... and pray... Then, you won't have to worry about tomorrow! Also...

Leave your worries on 'the worry tree'... A man came home from work and always touched a tree in his front yard before entering the house. Someone once asked him why he did this. His response? "That's my worry tree; I leave all my worries of the day out there, before I come into the house."

In Matthew 6:34, Jesus is recorded saying, "So don't worry about tomorrow. For tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today." Focus on today. Work hard. Do whatever you can. Plan out your next day, so you can focus on God on the way home. Here's another step to get 'back on track' with God...

I REFLECT ON MY DAY WITH A GRATEFUL HEART. Gratitude is simply 'being thankful'. William Ward once wrote: "Gratitude can transform common days into Thanksgiving, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings." So, *being thankful ... can literally transform how we look at our days!* And if you think this is impossible for you, because of your challenging days, let me remind you of the Apostle Paul—one who was mocked, persecuted, beaten, and seemed to have every reason *not* to be thankful. He said (1 Thessalonians 5:18a): "Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus."

Paul was a hard worker; he got caught up in his work; he got caught up in God's calling on his life. But his attitude was different, wasn't it? He wasn't on his cell phone, complaining to his friends, every day after work. He was thankful. When you're thankful ... it takes you from negative to positive; *it changes you.* (The transformation is not always in others; it's in us!) *Reflect on your day with a thankful heart.* Next...

I DEVELOP A HEALTHY EVENING ROUTINE. Think about it; routines are important, aren't they? They help us to be consistent in what we do with our days. I mean, mornings we all have our routines ... and we have our daytime/work routines, but what about evenings?

Now, think about this: when you were a child, you probably had a strict evening routine, and your parents held you to it. You went to school. You came home from school, sat down, and did your homework. Then you had play time. Then (at least at my house), you sat down and had a family dinner. Then, there was bath time, and story time, and maybe a prayer time—all before going to bed. You had a routine—parentally supervised!

But what about now? For some reason, when we grew up—for many of us, the idea of a healthy evening routine went right out the window! And, *now that we're adults ... we just sort of wing it, don't we?* Every night looks different; and because every night looks different, it's easy to get off-track with God. Folks, I want to encourage you to develop a healthy evening routine, centered on a few anchors that'll help you get your

evenings ‘back on track’ with God. I know all our evening routines are going to be different, but we all need anchors... Are you ready? Here are...

Anchors to a healthy evening routine:

- *Have a routine evening meal ... together!* Studies show ... one of the most vital anchors for your evening is *a regular family dinner?* Did you know when you have dinner together, kids do better in school, are happier, better socially-adjusted, and less likely to have emotional problems? So, look at your evening routine—especially a meal time; it’s a great time to connect with one another ... and with God. James 4:8 tells us, “Come close to God, and God will come close to you.” Make sure you acknowledge God’s presence in your home through prayer at the dinner table—so important.
- Here’s another anchor: *Brush your teeth!* Here’s my challenge to you: Write out a favorite memory verse (like Jeremiah 15:19) and put it on your mirror; go over it every evening when you brush your teeth (and you’ll get a toothbrush reminder as you leave today). This means, instead of going to bed at night, after watching the evening news, worrying about all that’s going on in the world, looking at social media and feeling like your life’s off-track, *you can find rest by being reminded of God’s blessings*—his promises to YOU! And finally...

I END MY DAY WITH GOD. We’ve been talking today about getting ‘back on track’ with God in our evenings, knowing God wants us to get a good night of rest—not of stress! So, what are we going to do about it?

Let me ask you: *What’s the last thing you do before you fall asleep?* Watch Netflix? Read the latest novel? Check your emails? Or check other social media?

There was a recent poll that said 71% of Americans sleep with their smart phones. In other words, their phone is the last thing they look at, at night, and the first thing they look at in the morning. But studies have also shown that that lit screen won’t help you rest; they don’t often help you end your day with peace. They’ll help you find stress, but they won’t recharge you and won’t refresh you at the end of a day...

Folks, the best way to end your day, as you wind down, as you get into bed, as you start to fall asleep ... is to make sure you’re ending your day with God. Declare your bed an ‘electronic-free zone’, would you? What I’m saying is, there should come a time every night when you put your phone away. Put it out of sight. And give the last few minutes of your day to God ... to talk to him, or read a couple verses from his word. Let me close with a couple reminders from God’s word...

Psalms 4:8 says, “In peace, I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, will keep me safe.” Think about it. What if you fell asleep reading a verse of scripture, or fell asleep while talking to God? I’m telling you, God wouldn’t be offended; God would be thrilled—thrilled to help end your day in peace and give you ... REST. And that’s what getting ‘back on track’ with God in our evenings should be all about. Jesus says (Matthew 11:28, NLT), “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Do you believe him?