

## Searching for Bedtime Bliss and Morning Glory



So often our busy lives create chaos. A careful routine at bedtime and morning, one that includes time spent with family and God, can do much to compensate for the hectic levels of activity and stress.

SUMMER IS OVER AND THE SCHOOL-YEAR SCHEDULE IS HERE. IF YOUR HOUSE IS ANYTHING LIKE MINE, THAT SET-IN-STONE BEDTIME GRADUALLY SLID LATER AND LATER AS THE SUMMER PROGRESSED. NOW THAT SCHOOL HAS BEGUN, THE MORNING WAKE-UP CALL IS A STRUGGLE AND THE BEDTIME BEASTIES HAVE REARED THEIR UGLY HEADS.

The reality of our mornings and bedtimes can seem far away from the promise of Ps. 3:5: “I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me.”

It sounds so simple, doesn't it? Well, it is simple if we can remember the three most important things about bedtime and mornings: routine, routine, and routine.

Young children crave routine. The familiarity of routine helps make sense and predictability out of the world. Older children may balk at routine, but it serves an important function in their lives as well. Being able to set, adjust, and follow a routine in order to achieve a goal is an important part of the skill of self-regulation. Children (as well as adults) who self-regulate can apply this skill to every aspect of learning—from academics to arts to athletics. Without self-regulation, learning is haphazard at best. With self-regulation, growth and development in every area can be seen and measured. Good mornings and good nights not only help with the immediate learning of the day, but serve to prepare your

children for future learning as well.

“When you walk, they will lead you; when lie down, they will watch over you, and when you awake, they will talk with you” (Prov. 6:22).

This verse about waking and sleeping refers to the guidance of God's commands. His commands become our routine and that routine is consistent and comforting. The routines children learn early in life can bless them in life lessons.

For young children, bedtime and morning can be difficult times because they are concerned with being separated from their parents. They need reassurance that even when eyes are closed, Mom and Dad are still there. Mornings often mean they will soon be physically separated from parents; the assurance of routine and experience will eventually calm their fears. This is part of learning how to self-soothe—valuable life skill. Children who can self-soothe can keep themselves calm in the face of problems. This

is the first step in the process of solving those problems.

For school-age children, the issue is more about whether they are missing something. It's hard enough to fall asleep when adults are awake, but the late setting of the sun is yet another indication that there is still life going on. A set routine to follow and reassurance that the new day will bring new adventures can ease this concern. This is an important time of life to learn to prioritize. Learning to organize bedtime and mornings will teach your child to get the most out of each day. This also part of the ability to delay gratification. Your child will learn that sleeping now will make playtime more fun later. Likewise, organizing school work now will mean less stress at school later.

Pre-adolescent children are reasserting their independence and wanting to take control of bedtimes and morning times. It can be easy to make the mistake of "giving up the fight" and dropping all routines. However, this is a time when routine is especially important. As your older child stretches his wings, let him set routines that suit him better, but do not let routine drop entirely. Changing shower time from evening to morning is not a battle to fight; neglecting to establish a routine for packing up homework is asking for trouble.

Here it is important to remember that as you allow your child to take on more responsibility, you also must be ready to allow him or her to endure the consequences of not following a schedule. Resist that temptation to turn the car around for the forgotten assignment. Likewise, resist the temptation to say "I told you so." Be empathetic to your child's stress while letting the consequence play out. This will make for the most effective learning while discouraging manipulation.

Each family will develop their own practical routine. Just about any routine can work. *The key is to have a routine.*

## Bedtime TIPS

- ▶ Agree to a set bedtime and stick to it.
- ▶ Begin winding down an hour before bedtime by turning off the television.
- ▶ Keep caffeinated drinks away from your child, especially in the evening.
- ▶ Prayer or devotion time is a great way to end the day.
- ▶ Children who want more control or choices can be redirected in a healthy way to choosing their clothes for the next day or making plans for how to spend it.



## Morning TIPS

- ▶ Agree to a morning wake-up time and stick to it. Do not use the snooze alarm.
- ▶ The more that can be done the night before (setting out clothes, packing school bags and lunches) the better, unless your family members are morning larks.
- ▶ Watching television or playing electronic games can be great ways to relax, but it's not recommended for early morning. Try quiet conversation or music.
- ▶ Breakfast is important for your child's growth and health.
- ▶ I am not a morning person, but I did find great benefit in making sure I was up and ready before I woke my young children. Mornings are less hectic this way.

## General Routine TIPS

- ▶ Try to avoid changing routine, except for set times of the year (like summer, the start of the school year, or birthdays).
- ▶ Pay attention to temperamental changes in your children. A morning shower might wake up some children, but a bedtime bath might be better to help others relax.
- ▶ Creating a check list is an excellent way to assure that tasks get done without parents hovering like helicopters. Abandon the lists when tasks become habitual.
- ▶ As they get older, give children more responsibility for taking care of themselves.
- ▶ While Saturdays can often break the routine, try to keep a routine for Sunday that is closer to the weekday routine.

## For Discussion:

1. What bedtime routines comforted you as a child?
2. Are you a night owl or a morning lark? What about your spouse and children?
3. How do your children benefit from sticking to morning and evening routines?
4. How do those routines change as your children mature?
5. What aspect of your family's morning or evening needs the most work? Can you establish a routine that will work for everyone?

### For further study:

- [www.jcparentzone.com](http://www.jcparentzone.com) (parenting advice from Lutheran Hour Ministries).
- <http://tinyurl.com/pruard> (love and logic article on bedtime routines).
- <http://tinyurl.com/osuvsn> (parenting.com article on morning routines).