

SLEEP ANXIETY

Care Guide

A field-ready reference for biblical counselors using a three-part process to examine the struggle, encourage in Scripture, and execute through sanctification.

Examine the Struggle

Use these questions and observations to assess sleep-related anxiety, discern patterns and thought processes, and understand its spiritual and emotional contours.

Emotional & Cognitive

- Persistent fear about not falling asleep or not getting enough sleep
- Ongoing rumination about the consequences of poor sleep (e.g., "If I don't sleep well, I'll ruin tomorrow")
- Intrusive thoughts at bedtime that feel irrational and fear-driven
- Sense of responsibility for producing the right amount/quality of sleep

When you think about going to bed, what fear do you most often experience?

What do you think will happen if you *don't* fall asleep quickly?

How much control do you feel you should have over your body's ability to sleep?

Behavioral

- Rigid bedtime routines (rituals intended to ensure sleep)
- Avoidance of going to bed or prolonged bedtime delays
- Switching locations (couch, chair) in an attempt to control sleep
- Frequent checking of sleep trackers or clock-watching

Tell me about your bedtime routines.

Have you ever tried relaxing the routine? What happened?

Do you avoid sleep, bedtime, or even your bed? What do you do instead?

Physical

- Restlessness, increased tension before bedtime
- Difficulty relaxing despite fatigue
- Sleep disruption or insomnia patterns

Have you ever gone more than 72 hours without sleep?
(If yes, or if the person is at risk for severe sleep deprivation, encourage medical evaluation as a necessary step alongside pastoral care.)

Do you ever feel so desperate that you have done or have been tempted to do something dangerous to achieve sleep? If so, what have you done?

Spiritual

- Belief that not sleeping well means a lack of trust in God
- Pressure to perform spiritually or emotionally so sleep comes
- Believing that faithful obedience should guarantee sleep

What do you believe God thinks about your difficulty with sleep?

Do you see sleep as something you must produce, or as a gift God gives?

How does your sleep anxiety affect your trust in God's provision?

Encourage in Scripture

Use these passages to reframe trust, rest, control, and surrender.

Psalm 127:1-2 — *“He gives sleep to those He loves.”*

Use for: Reorienting from self-activity to God’s provision.

How: Teach that sleep is a gift from God, not something we must produce through perfect performance or routines.

Psalm 3:5 — *“I lie down and sleep; I wake again, for the LORD sustains me.”*

Use for: Comfort in resting with dependence on God’s sustaining presence.

How: Emphasize that rest (even if not ideal sleep) can be surrendered to God.

Matthew 6:25-34 — *“Do not be anxious about your life.”*

Use for: Redirecting thoughts from worry about sleep to God’s overarching care.

How: Encourage the counselee to place sleep worry into God’s care alongside daily needs like food and clothing.

Lamentations 3:22-23 — *“His mercies are new every morning.”*

Use for: Reassurance that mercy resets daily, regardless of last night’s sleep.

How: Teach hope, not based on perfect nights but on God’s daily mercy.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 — *“My strength is made perfect in weakness.”*

Use for: Releasing performance pressure and finding strength in vulnerability.

How: Highlight that weakness (including sleeplessness) is a context for divine strength.

Execute through Sanctification

Here are practical growth assignments grounded in theological insights that help people move from control to surrender and from performance to trust.

Rest before Sleep: Focused Surrender Practice

Assignment: Each evening, set aside 10-15 minutes before bed to intentionally rest without pursuing sleep.

- Sit or lie down in quiet.
- Read Psalm 127:2 and say out loud, *“My responsibility is to rest; my hope is God’s gift of sleep.”*
- Breathe slowly, asking God for presence not productivity.

Goal: Shift the focus from getting sleep to being with God while waiting for sleep.

Routine Flexibility Practice

Assignment: For one week, intentionally loosen bedtime rules:

- Go to bed later than usual.
- Read or listen to Scripture in a different room before sleeping.
- Remove the pressure of an exact bedtime or “perfect sleep environment.”

Goal: Reduce anxiety tied to rigid control by practicing flexibility.

Mercy Reminder Cards (Lamentations 3:22–23)

Assignment: Each morning, write or recite:

- *“God’s mercy is new today because of Jesus.”*
- One specific area where you experienced God’s provision yesterday.

Goal: Anchor hope in daily mercy, not in sleep outcomes.

Practice Creaturely Limits

Assignment: Sleep anxiety thrives on the illusion of control. This exercise cultivates humility and dependence rather than efficiency. Once weekly, intentionally do something that reminds you of your creaturely limitations.

- Examples:
 - Ask for help on a simple ordinary task that you could probably do without assistance. Receive that help without apology.
 - Choose one activity (walking, eating, praying) and do it intentionally slowly. Don’t speed up, don’t multi-task, don’t optimize.
 - Name one limit you know you have and ask how God can use it for His glory (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- Then journal one sentence: *“What did it feel like to stop pressuring myself to perform?”* Close by reading Psalm 103:14.

Goal: To practice trust through limitation rather than mastery.

Thought vs. Truth List (Anxiety Focus)

Assignment:

- Each night before bed, write:
 - Thought: *“If I don’t sleep well, tomorrow will be awful.”*
 - Truth: *“God’s mercies are new each morning; Jesus sustains me.”*
- Repeat truth aloud.

Goal: Replace catastrophizing with grounded gospel truth.

Optional Supplement - You may need to involve a:

- **Medical doctor** for cardiac, respiratory, or physical symptoms of unknown cause
- **Psychiatrist** for severe or obsessive compulsive disorder
- **Pastor/Elder** for ongoing relational and spiritual support
- **Trusted friend or spouse** for accountability, presence, and practical help

You can find expanded resources on this topic in ABC’s membership page at christiancounseling.com.