

I have a feather bed. It was passed down from my great grandmother (and probably her mother) and sits in my spare room. It's big, soft, and *hugely* comfortable.

Too comfortable, in fact. That's why it's in the spare room, and not my bedroom. I've always felt that this feather bed was too important to actually sleep in - a family heirloom, one that required a sort of veneration, not to be sullied by actual use. Added to that, a long time ago I read somewhere that a hard mattress was good for your spine, so I bought one for my bed and have been sleeping on it for years.

However, as time went on and age and arthritis claimed my attention, my hard mattress no longer did the trick. I slept badly and woke up out of sorts. My usual daily tasks became chores that I could no longer do to perfection, and that bothered me.

I was confiding all this to a friend at church one day. "I don't know why, but I don't seem to be able to sleep properly, and it's making me cranky."

"You mean, more cranky than usual." she said with a smile.

I was indignant. "What do you mean, 'more cranky than usual'?"

"Well." she said, "let's face it, you are a bit difficult to live with, playing the martyr, and constantly monitoring our performances, making sure we know when we don't pull our weight."

I had to admit that was true, but I felt that it was my duty to point out any slack behaviour on the part of my fellow church goers. "Surely that's the hard and narrow way Jesus was talking about? I mean, all the big saints were into endurance, especially Paul - stoning, flogging, starvation and all. That's why he's my favourite saint. Anything less would be giving in, being soft."

"It's true that the great saints suffered, but they didn't *choose* all those setbacks; it was just a part of the journey. And how do you think they were able to endure all that?"

"I guess they were tough, fought the good fight, ran the good race - stuff like that."

"Perhaps they simply got a good night's sleep, every night." she said.

"Don't be ridiculous!" I said, "They slept on prison floors and on the ground a lot of the time. How can you get a good night's sleep doing that? No. I'll have to tough this out. If it was their lot, it will be mine too."

My friend sighed deeply. "When I said, 'a good night's sleep', I wasn't being literal. Let me ask you a question. Where do you think they got their strength from, in order to endure and keep on enduring?"

"They got it from the strength of Jesus." I replied confidently.

"And how do you think that happened?"

I had to think about that one.

"I suppose they prayed and asked God for it. After all, he does hear our prayers."

"Do you think they trusted God?"

"Of course! They knew that their prayers would be answered."

"Oh dear." she sighed. "Let me put it this way. You are suffering from lack of sleep because of an uncomfortable bed. When you pray, do you rest on God? I mean, *really* rest on God?"

I chewed this one over. I had to admit that my prayers were usually all about gaining strength to get through the tough times ahead. I also thanked God that I could achieve all the good works I had set out to do. But I also had to admit that there was a smattering of pride in this. I was proud that I, as a follower of Christ, was chosen to endure suffering with him, and that I was so diligent in doing so. Actually, it was more like, 'Bring it on! I'll cope with it, because I love and serve Jesus!'

Eventually I replied, "I guess I've never thought about it in those terms."

"Look at it this way," she said, "You *will* insist on sleeping on a hard mattress, even though it's causing you grief, and even though you have a beautiful, comfortable feather bed you could sink into. And you will insist on *choosing* the hard road, rather than resting in God's love so you can wake up refreshed and able to deal with stuff that is simply a part of living, difficult or otherwise. So go home, and tonight put yourself to bed in that heirloom you think is too 'holy' to be put to practical, sensible use, and see what happens."

So I did just that. That night I got ready for bed and went to the spare room. I stood for a long time looking at this bed that I had for too long set up as unapproachable, and therefore neglected as a possible source of comfort and healing for my aches and pains. Then I slid between the sheets and had the first good sleep I'd had for ages. As a result, I woke up the next morning feeling as though I could actually face the world.

Now my spare room has become my bedroom. I even rescued Poochy, my teddy bear, off the top shelf of my wardrobe, so he can share in the deeply luxurious experience of my new sleeping arrangements.

And as for my prayer life? Well, now I look forward to sinking into God, instead of holding him at arm's length.

All this and heaven too.

The Feather bed

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.' (Matt. 11:28 - NIV)



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