

THE RED LIGHT

by | Matthew McNutt

Lately I feel like I've been driving a ticking time bomb.

I don't know what's going to happen, but I live with the constant, nagging feeling that I'm on the verge of something bad with my car. I have two hopes—that it won't be today, and even better, that the check-engine light will turn off, and whatever it is lurking below the hood of my car will magically get better on its own.

But you'd think I'd know better. I once destroyed an engine by ignoring that little red light of doom. I kept hoping the problem would go away. Instead I ended up on the side of a road with a smoking, very dead car.

Turns out a small bolt had come loose and was bouncing around in there. Eventually it got deeper into the engine and managed to grind it all up, destroying parts that this mechanically challenged writer has never seen nor heard of. According to my mechanic—who apparently thought I would appreciate knowing this—if I had brought the car in right away, it would have been an easy (and more importantly, cheap) fix.

Instead, I got to buy an entire engine.

Ignoring those warning lights can be costly and dangerous. Whatever issue triggered them in the first place rarely improves or even stays static. The problem almost always gets worse with continued use with neglect. But here's what got me thinking about all this: While I was sitting in my car the other day, stuck in traffic and staring at my bright red check engine light, I thought, Wouldn't it be nice if our bodies had check engine lights? (Nothing too obvious—bright red lights on our foreheads would definitely make puberty that much more brutal.)

But here's the thing: We have a ton of warning lights that we ignore all the time. One of the biggest ones? Exhaustion.

How close to the edge are we running our bodies if we're conking out every time we sit still for more than a few seconds? I'm not talking about falling asleep during a three-hour lecture in a warm room with overly comfy seats—that's not exhaustion. But if you're dozing in your office, on the couch, in your car, during your favorite movies, or any time you let your pace slow down for a few moments, that's your body lighting up the service engine light and begging for maintenance.

Studies have shown over and over that our bodies need somewhere in the neighborhood of nine hours of sleep at night—yet since the dawn of electricity, our sleep

patterns have been gradually whittled away to smaller and smaller numbers. From creation all the way up to the recent past, humans went to bed when the sun went down; we had to—you just can't do a whole lot by candlelight. But now everything's different, and as a culture, we've actually taken busyness and our addiction to activity to the point of being proud of how little sleep we get. We're even jealous of the guy who can function on four hours of sleep a night—and in some twisted way, we now look at people as weak or lazy who sleep the number of hours per night that God designed us to need.

Sleep deprivation has some serious consequences to these bodies that God made into temples. When we consistently operate on too little sleep, our ability to focus, our memory, and our stress levels are all adversely affected. Even our general sense of energy and attitude take a hit, whether we realize it or not. Depression and lowered immunity are also associated with getting too little sleep.

Given my background, I was particularly fascinated to discover that two of our weight-related hormones are also negatively impacted by a lack of sleep. The first, Leptin (which controls appetite), is depleted when we're tired. Meanwhile our bodies overproduce the second hormone, Ghrelin, which is an appetite stimulant.

Ultimately, how we treat our bodies reflects our view of its value. Do we look at our bodies as the temples of the Holy and perfect God? Or are they just some tool that we have no problem running ragged until it drops?

To be honest, a big part of the reason I haven't been taking that warning light in my car too seriously is because the pile of metal is only worth a few hundred bucks. It's fifteen years old, it's logged too many miles to count, and the stereo doesn't work.

Our minivan, on the other hand, would be expensive to replace. When we even get a hint of something wrong, I'm on it—because I'm afraid of the cost of ignoring something that represents great value.

So...shouldn't we have the same sense of urgency when it comes to God's temples? Don't ignore the warning signals your body broadcasts. When we're out of balance physically, it won't be long before the spiritual is impacted as well. 🙏



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