

P Prayers
for
Sleepless
Nights

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PUBLICATIONS

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Introduction

If you've been there you already know it. Sleepless nights are hard. They can be harder still when they come after—or worse yet, before—difficult days. It is as though we conduct a solitary rehearsal for tomorrow's problems in the middle of the night. We are the director; we are the writers, constantly editing and revising the script in our heads; and we act it out in our minds. Of course, it almost never plays out the way we scripted it.

I know...like you, I've spent many sleepless nights wrestling with the small details of the day—and the larger questions of life. Yet, in spite of the fact that I certainly didn't choose this unwanted wakefulness, in some ways it has turned out to be a gift. Over time, and over many a long night, I started having conversations with God that have taken me to surprising places. *Prayers for Sleepless Nights* arose out of those conversations. We want to be, and are supposed to be, asleep. Everyone else in the world is. Well, as it turns out, many of them are not. It is for them—for you—that I have written this book.

So why not do something with this newfound, if unwelcome, time? There is a lot to be said for prayer in the night. Nighttime is usually quieter, there are fewer distractions, and you probably feel less guilt over not doing something “constructive”—as if prayer were not constructive in its own right. At the same time, life can look quite different at night. Things that seemed minor by day can loom much larger, and things that already loom large by day can cast a suffocating shadow at night. But there's light even in the darkness, because we are not there alone.

I sometimes think of God's presence during long, sleepless nights as something along the lines of those fund-raising telecasts, where the announcer says, “We have someone standing by waiting to take your call.” Clearly, that's a theological over-simplification of God's presence, but it certainly points in the right direction. Someone is perfectly ready and willing to take our call. And “perfectly” is the operative word. The psalmists figured this out several thousand years ago. Whether song, poetry, praise or lament, the psalms reflect a sense of personal conversation with the Divine. Thousands of years ago, people were

evidently feeling many of the same emotions we feel today, and they called upon faith to get through it and grow from it.

The prayers in this book are prayers of friendship, of companionship with God. They are not intended as sleep aids—although it would be nice if it worked out that way! Rather, they are intended as possibilities for you to make use of your wakeful times and wandering thoughts. After all, you are awake. God is awake. And God is there for you.

Each of the prayers is followed by a scripture quote for your reflection. My hope is that you will use these prayers and scripture reflections as a starting point for your own prayers. At the end of each topic is a section for “My Prayers,” where you can jot down your own thoughts and prayers. You may want to keep a notebook nearby so you can write as much as you like. Remember that your prayers don’t have to be elegant or formal. The God who loves and hears us is there to receive our thoughts, words and feelings. Just like the close friend or family member to whom you can pour out your thoughts and emotions, God is there to receive your stream of consciousness, no matter the time of day or night. Think of your words as part of your conversation with God, just as the psalmist who wrote the lines below did. Perhaps he or she had also experienced his or her fair share of sleepless nights before writing these words in prayer:

*Let my prayer be counted as incense before you,
and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice.
(Psalm 141:2)*

Prayers for Sleepless Nights



Anxieties

There are as many reasons for being awake and anxious in the middle of the night as there are people who are awake. And, as if other anxieties aren't enough, there is the plain fact that you are awake when everyone else is, theoretically, asleep. It may not be fair. It certainly isn't fun. But it doesn't have to be futile.

❖ **Night Watches**

Midnight, one o'clock, one thirty, two o'clock. Should I look at those little lighted numbers again? No. Yes. No. What, only fifteen minutes have passed? Will morning ever come? Faithful Friend who watches over me in the day hours, are you also there with me in this endless night?

One is calling to me from Seir, "Sentinel, what of the night? Sentinel, what of the night?" The sentinel says: "Morning comes, and also the night. If you will inquire, inquire; come back again." (Isaiah 21:11-12)

❖ **Jitters**

If I were not so jittery, Lord, maybe I could pray. To be honest, if I were not so jittery, maybe I'd be asleep instead of thinking about praying. Lord Jesus, help me do one or the other. But if it's all the same to you, at this moment I'd go for sleep. I ask you, who can calm waves and disciples, how do I calm myself?

*I will both lie down and sleep in peace;
for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.
(Psalm 4:8)*

