

Finding God When Your Baby Won't Go to Sleep

My youngest child is 14 months old. And she has never, not once, slept through the night. That is roughly 426 nights, straight, of broken sleep for me.

My first child slept 12 hours through the night from early infancy. My second child was a bit more of a challenge because we lived across the street from a busy urban fire station, but eventually, he, too, became a twelve-hour sleeper. We put our tinies to bed at 7 p.m. and did not hear from them until the next morning. I waxed philosophic, contemplated writing a baby sleep book to share my wisdom.

Enter Evelynn.

Evelynn is healthy. She hardly ever cries. She has never had a bout with colic. She is happy and delightful. She is secure. She is loved. She is a good eater. She naps consistently and well.

And she does not sleep at night.

For a long time, exhausted and sick with longing for my bed, I tried every trick and tactic to help her sleep through the night. I grappled with my ideals, finally tried out the things I always swore I would never allow, but nothing ever worked. She was up every hour or two, every night, every night, every night.

This was what she needed, clearly, and so I began to wonder, after several months, if maybe, just maybe, God had something here for me too. *Grace of God, will you be here for me in this?* I asked for wisdom, I asked for help, I cried, I begged, I wondered, I read, and then, in the stillness of one long night of nursing, I heard the Spirit of the living God say to

me, Let her be, and minister love to her small soul, and this will be our time, too, Sarah. So I found it easier to roll out of bed, head to her tiny room, nurse her, rock her, hold her, over and over and over again.

I started to pray in those moments. I started to hold the big things of the world and the little things of my home up for God to notice. I started to sing old songs from church. I started to rock until we were both half-asleep.

I started to sit in the silence, quiet, waiting, even after she drifted off in my arms. I started to find my energy. I started to be OK with it. I started to find God in the stillness, in the darkness, in the giving, in the exhaustion. It was good. It was sacred. And, yes, it was every day.

I remember one night this past winter, I stood in the middle of my living room, alone, in the wee small hours. The cold house was lit with stars and street lights. I couldn't go back to bed. It was so quiet, so still, so other-worldly.

I was brimming with something like wonder in the loneliness of the night. I could see the stars. Something in me wanted to stay there, awake with all the mothers' hearts up in the small hours. I felt them. I remembered a phrase from the Common Prayers, that I was with those who wait and watch and weep in the night.

A thin connection was there. I felt a holy sorrow and knowing—an enveloping love. I felt held, and I felt like I was holding. I was breathing in the Holy Spirit, cold and bright and enough.

Two hours later, I wasn't so sanguine.

I was tired. I just wanted to sleep for two hours together. I was muttering and resentful. But as I lifted her, whimpering and longing and alone, again, she exhaled with relief, and she fell asleep minutes later, milk-drunk and peaceful. And I

wondered if I was writing a story with my life in these nights—because if I was, then this would be the chapter of metaphors.

At 14 months of age, just this past week or so, she began to sleep most of the night. She still wakes up once, maybe twice, a night. The first few nights that she slept for six hours straight, I woke up frequently, panicked, rushing to her room. But she slept, peaceful, and I found I was disappointed.

I missed her. I missed the quiet. I missed the stillness. I missed the prayer. I missed the worship. I missed those hours of communion. I missed the weight of her need in my arms, I missed being able to minister peace and rest. Just like that, it was over. This stage was over. She was sleeping. I went back to bed.

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