

Weekly Prayer for Bedtime

Prayer: a solemn request for help, an expression of thanks or awe, or a heartfelt apology addressed to God or an object of worship.



July 9th - the first week (keep it simple)

*I see the moon
And the moon sees me
God bless the moon
And God bless me*

This is an old standard and one that I just love! It's simple and sweet and... I love the moon!

As much as the moon changes each night, its path, position, and posture are predictable. On nights when it's cloudy or stormy, it's hard to see the moon. And, depending on its placement, sometimes we see the moon during the day! If you'd like to take it a step further...

See what the moon will be up to, here's a website that shows the Phases of the Moon...

<https://www.almanac.com/astronomy/moon/calendar#>

Make a practice of noticing the moon on your own, here are some charts you can fill in...

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Browse/Search:moon%20phases%20calendar>

(Parents, grandparents - some nice moon activities here!)

Genesis 1:14-19

¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

Here is a Mi'kmaq tale about the moon <http://www.native-languages.org/mikmaqstory3.htm> from a list of Native American moon stories found here <http://www.native-languages.org/legends-moon.htm>.

Parents and grandparents, learning a story and then telling it - as our ancestors once did - is impactful for children. When she was little, at bedtime, Emma would ask for a story, "...from your mouth" more often than asking to have a book read to her. There is something that touches us deeply when we listen to the human voice, engage our minds in imagining the details, and sharpen our memories for "next time".

If music is a way you like to engage, there is no end to moon themed songs... Priscilla Herdman is a wonderful folk singer for adults - and we have loved her children's CDs. Here are two moon songs...

Howl at the Moon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x61-KXUZ6PI>

The Moon and Me: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abEUETq_sCk

July 16th - An old standard... refreshed?

(adapted - I have changed the address to "Spirit" to be gender inclusive)

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray to God my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake,
I pray for God my soul to take.

WOW! That prayer got dark pretty fast! And I'm not sure going to sleep with that thought in my head is very soul nourishing. It's the only one I remember from my childhood, and I'm sure it had a time and place; but it freaked me out! It's one I was uncomfortable sharing with my children. Did you know that's only the first verse of a "Child's Bedtime Prayer" by Henry Johnstone? Here's the rest...

*Spirit, unto thee I pray,
Thou hast guarded me all day;
Safe I am while in Thy sight,
Safely let me sleep tonight.
Bless my friends, the whole world bless;
Help me to learn helpfulness;
Keep me ever in Thy sight;
So to all I say good night.*

Now those are two verses I can get behind. Like many prayers, like many traditions, they each have a time and a place. Building on tradition, moving a beloved prayer forward a bit, making it relevant and accessible, I think that's a good thing. On Sunday, we heard a version of Genesis 1:1 from Archbishop Desmond Tutu's "Children of God Storybook Bible" which sounds nothing like King James' version... but no less poignant. It's lovely and accessible and fresh.

For this bedtime prayer, you could omit the first verse entirely, or modify it slightly...

*Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray to God my soul to keep;
God's love be with me through the night,
And wake me with the morning light.*

(Bonus: giving children something to memorize is brain building! Why not this long-ish prayer?)

July 23rd – Bedtime prayer in summer

*The daylight lingers as I rest,
The bird still restless in its nest.
I hear the last notes of the lark,
As I watch the coming of the dark.
Bless me as I dream and wake,
Through the night and at daybreak.*

This prayer was inspired by one of my favorite poems, "Bed in Summer" (below), by Robert Louis Stevenson; which perfectly captures what we experience, what we observe, as we hurtle through space around our glorious star. My "Child's Garden of Verses" was well thumbed, the pages with this poem were dog eared.

When my children were younger (16 and 19 feel so old and mature to them, I'm still holding out!), and I'd be tucking them into bed before their rooms were quite dark, I would ask if they wanted to keep their blinds open, "...to watch the darkness come."* It was a calculated move on my part - to have them meditate on the gloaming into sleep, to deeply connect with the rhythms of the Earth; to have them observe the changes in light at different times of year, to both feel and understand the workings of our solar system; to link both of these with reverence and awe, to connect to the Spirit. Science and Spirit intertwine so beautifully - just because we know why or how something occurs doesn't lessen the miracle of it's being.

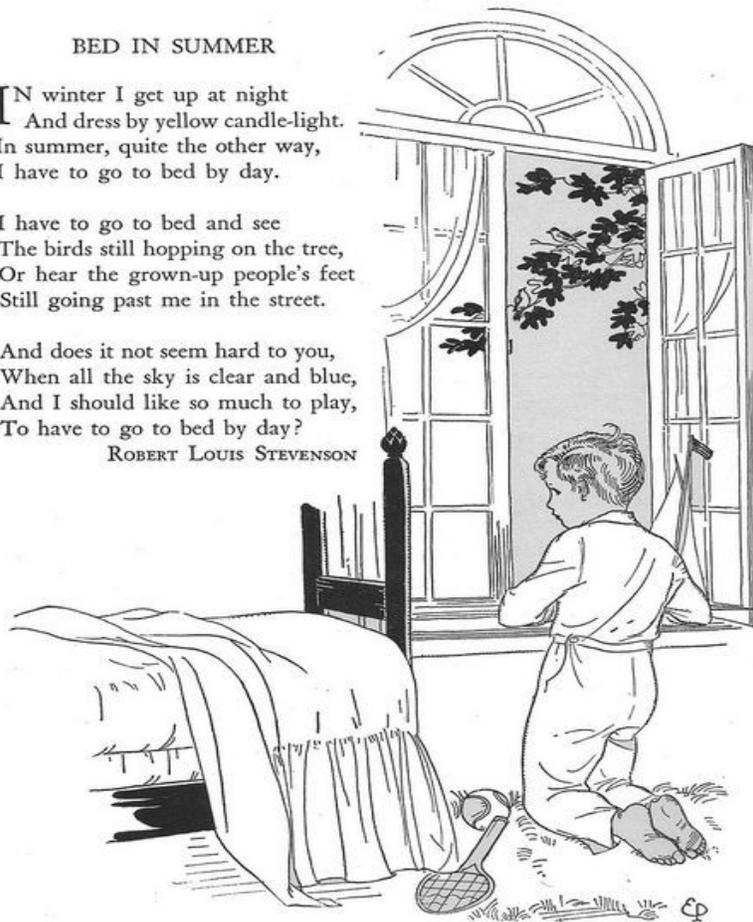
BED IN SUMMER

IN winter I get up at night
And dress by yellow candle-light.
In summer, quite the other way,
I have to go to bed by day.

I have to go to bed and see
The birds still hopping on the tree,
Or hear the grown-up people's feet
Still going past me in the street.

And does it not seem hard to you,
When all the sky is clear and blue,
And I should like so much to play,
To have to go to bed by day?

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



(* Pro Tip - if you leave the blinds open at bedtime, tip-toe in to close them before you go to bed; or you'll be up with the sun at 5am... which is fun once in a while, but makes for challenging parenting on a daily basis.)

July 30th - an attitude of gratitude

*As I prepare to rest,
I thank those who help me be my best.
Thank you, God, for... (help your child make a list of names)
Because of them, I am truly blessed.*

At this point, it's no secret that I'm a Mr. Rogers fan. Fred had a spiritual practice of remembering all the people who had contributed something to his life. All those people who were an influence, an inspiration, a help at just the right moment, a blessing. It's a different kind of contact tracing.

Covid-19 has many of us feeling a bit like a small boat being tossed about in a large ocean. We can feel very isolated and alone. But we carry with us the imprints of all those who have helped us in some way. Those who have helped us learn and grow. Little bits of light that helped illuminate our way. If we're lucky, that list grows day by day, week by week, year by year.

Just as people leave a trace on us, we have the power to leave a trace on the people we meet, too. What kind of trace do you wish to leave? In every interaction, imagine what your words and actions are left behind. What trace are you leaving on someone - or, even on a creature (I'm thinking of my pets, too)? Imagine your boat creates a trail as it sails through the waters of life... a little wake. Is it rough seas? Or, perhaps, it's like a wake of bio luminescence... full of light.

August 6th – a reminder to say our prayers is close at hand!



Building on last week's idea to pray for all those who help us, this week's offering expands that idea. We can pray for all sorts of people. Once you have helped your child create their list, you might like to recreate this poster. I love this version of the Five Finger Prayer.

Create a hand print with your child (pro tip from Miss Jan: brush the paint onto their hand rather than having them dip their hands in paint!), and then write the names of the people for whom they wish to pray in the areas where the directions are above. You may like to put pictures of people in those spaces as well. They may like to hang their art in their rooms - as another reminder.

This is also a great exercise for building skills at creating your own prayers. For having your prayers reflect your feelings and experiences. It doesn't have to rhyme and it doesn't need to be a Universal Truth. How, when, why, about what you pray is up to you. Sometimes I like saying a prayer that someone else came up with. Sometimes my prayers are very personal.

August 13th - Spirit in the hills, the forests, the oceans, the rivers... all the wild places

Psalm 121

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

My help cometh from God, which made heaven and earth.

God will not suffer thy foot to be moved: they that keepeth thee will not slumber.

Behold, they that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

God is thy keeper: God is thy shade upon thy right hand.

The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.

God shall preserve thee from all evil: God shall preserve thy soul.

God shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.



Some people use their favorite Psalm as their bedtime prayer each night. Psalm 121 is one of my all-time favorites. I often find my spirit renewed in wild places... like "the hills."

Most of the Bible is full of stories about the people and places and events in ancient days. The Psalms are different - they're like prayers or songs. They give us ways to communicate directly with the Divine. Maybe this one speaks to you, maybe you'd like to have a look at some others.

If you don't have a Bible handy, you can go to <https://www.biblegateway.com/> (I often like the words of the New Revised Standard Version).

August 20th – prayer inspired from what transpires around us

Mother God,

Cradle me as I take the nourishment of sleep,

Hold me close and keep me safe in your arms.

Bless all my family, my friends, and my neighbors,

Keep us, one and all, safe from worldly harm.



Some of my weekly prayers (for bedtime or as table graces) give a little wink to the theme for Sunday's service. Like this week, Sarah will preach on "God the Midwife" and we'll hear women's resistance voices from the Bible.

Linking prayer to something that transpired in your day, in your children's days, helps them connect their spirits with their daily lives. Spirit isn't just for church on Sunday, spirit is wherever we are, wherever we need it to be.

Why shouldn't our prayers reflect something we've encountered? When I have had a hard day, my bedtime prayer begins with those in my thoughts, and usually ends with a sigh and a request for guidance or strength or understanding. When it's been a good day, I still begin with prayers for others, and usually end with gratitude and praise. Sometimes my day has been hectic - neither good nor bad... just busy - and my prayer is quick and light. "Thank you and good night."

August 27th - a bedtime *blessing*...

*Nightlights that protect my sleeping children
Burn clear and steadfast tonight.*

Say this to my brother, sister or me and we are instantly transported to the Darling children's nursery. With our dog Pippa, instead of "Nana", tucking us in. Two girls and a boy - rather than two boys and a girl - waiting for Peter Pan to arrive. To this day, this scene from the musical *Peter Pan* (inspired by J. M. Barrie's book and play) gives me chills.

In that memorable scene, Michael Darling asks his mother, "Can anything harm us, Mother, after the nightlights are lit?" And his mother replies, "Nothing, precious. They are the eyes a mother leaves behind to guard her children. Now, sing your goodnight song, and into your bed." And the children sing...

*Tender Shepherd, Tender Shepherd,
Let me help you count your sheep;
One in the meadow,
Two in the garden,
Three in the nursery,
Fast asleep, fast asleep.*

*One, say your prayers and,
Two, close your eyes and,
Three safe and happily,
Fall asleep, fall asleep.*



(It's a round - if you like to sing or like a musical challenge, allow the cast to begin... when they begin the second line, you start the first line - or call me, and we'll sing it together!)

Nightlight. Tender Shepherd. These are beautiful expressions of how we may see or interpret the Divine for protection and care. Sleep is and represents such a vulnerable place, we are giving ourselves over to our fatigue, refreshing bodies and spirits from a long day for the day ahead, allowing ourselves to slip into unconsciousness. If Mother Darling or Nana aren't there to protect us while we sleep, to whom do we turn? Our Nightlight and Tender Shepherd. Always there. Watching over. Steadfast.

May we all look and work for a world where this may be true for all.

Here is the scene from a stage production...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RqeSreXU3g>