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CHOSEN IN CHRIST  
CALLED TO INFLUENCE

## Patience in Prayer

What you need to  
know when God seems  
silent and far away.



## Patience in Prayer

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far away.



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Introduction

## Quiet Times from God

By Janine Petry



Though it's been a while since she actually *slept* during naptime, I still insist my preschooler has one. I lovingly refer to it as "taking a rest," but she's not quite as enamored with the idea. It's all I can do not to laugh when, after 15 short minutes of silence, I hear her high-pitched question: "Mom, is it time to wake up yet?"

She just doesn't get naptime. And I can't seem to explain it to her. How do you explain "one hour" to someone whose concept of time is five minutes long—which to her might as well be all eternity? Or how do you explain your fore-knowledge of—and deep desire to



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avoid—all the negative consequences of what will inevitably happen should the rest time be compromised? I can't. So in the end, she just has to trust me—and take her nap.

Now, I might giggle about her shenanigans, but if you ask me about my quiet times from God, there's not much to laugh about. I confess: I can dish it out, but when God asks me to wait on him, I can't take it! I hate the thought of slowing down, of waiting, or worst of all—silence. And my questions are ceaseless: How long, Lord? When, Lord? And why? Why? *Why?*

When I think about it, I'm not sure I'd be able to understand God's answers any more than my daughter could understand mine. Isaiah 55:9 says, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." So in the end, I just have to trust him—and take my "nap."

In the following collection of articles, you'll find advice on how to make it through a period of silence from God. You'll be encouraged by the insights that others learned from waiting on the Lord and listening for his voice. And you'll be reminded that though you wait patiently, you'll never wait alone.

Blessings,

*Janine Petry*

Contributing Editor, KYRIA downloads,  
Christianity Today International



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Leader's Guide

## How to use "Patience in Prayer" for a group study



"Patience in Prayer" can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

1. **Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
2. **Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
3. **Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
4. **Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
5. **When working through the "Reflect" questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
6. **End the session in prayer.**



## When Life's on Hold



Three ways to find worth  
in your wait.

*By Faith Tibbetts McDonald*

**G**ive me more than a minute to scan the tabloid headlines in the grocery store check-out line, and I become a frenzied, toe-tapping, scowling creep. In one such moment, I actually considered jamming my cart into the heels of a shopper who cut in line.

Conditioned by our instant-messaging, fast-food eating, "need it now" culture, I've developed an intolerance for waiting. Sometimes, I'm so intent on reaching a goal or straining toward a coveted destination, I forget the Bible considers waiting good: "It is good to wait patiently for the Lord to save us," says Lamentations 3:26 (CEV).





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Our lives include different types of waiting that span a variety of circumstances. Some waits are merely annoying inconveniences. Others are rife with threats. I experienced both the morning of September 11, 2001. I began the day in a doctor's waiting room with my daughter, who was scheduled for an 8:30 checkup. By 9:30, the embarrassed receptionist apologized profusely for the delay. As it turned out, the doctor wasn't even in the building. Fuming over wasted time and our subsequent tardiness, I left and headed for my daughter's school.

Abruptly, news reports of terrorist attacks jarred the morning's first wait into perspective. My minor inconvenience no longer concerned me as I entered a more emotionally arduous wait for word from my husband who was visiting Philadelphia and staying near places being evacuated in case of another attack. Much more agonizing was the wait of those whose loved ones never came home that day. When the wait is inexplicable and steeped in suffering, we have to cling to God.

I've learned this lesson from watching my friend Lisa. While in his early 30s, Lisa's husband was severely debilitated by a crippling disease. At its onset, I waited with Lisa for a miracle that didn't come. Her husband now lives apart from his family in a nursing home where he's surrounded by dying people twice his age. I've prayed. I've cried. I've accused God of turning his back on Lisa and her family. Each time, God gently turns my face to gaze on him, not the circumstance.





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In a wait that doesn't seem to end, we must look beyond our surroundings to God and trust him with the outcome. While the wait is grueling, God never puts us on hold to tend to more urgent matters; his purpose always is being fulfilled in our waiting.

From God's perspective, waiting is an exercise he's designed to help us develop patience, a sign of spiritual maturity. The New Testament writer James urges us to "let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:4, NKJV).

Sometimes waiting builds our character; other times it's God's way of granting us a much-needed rest. For example, last year my job ended abruptly. While I looked for another, my less- hectic schedule provided opportunities for me to enjoy my family, exercise more, and dabble in projects. I was thankful for the breather when, as suddenly as the first job ended, another employment opportunity opened up. God knows when we're exhausted, and he wants us to have time to catch our breath. Psalm 23:2–3 reminds us, "He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul."

If you're going through a waiting period, here are three ways to profit from it:

***1. Wait quietly.*** When I was growing up, our family traveled three long days by car from Canada to New England every other summer to visit relatives. I was the child who trumpeted in time with the mile markers: "Are we there yet?"







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Today we live in the busiest, noisiest time in history. But God encourages his waiting ones to be still and spend time being quiet. I've learned to quell my fretting about wasting time waiting by thinking about God's promises. While between jobs, I returned repeatedly to this verse from Psalm 16:5: "Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure." Knowing God had secured my future, I could wait quietly for him to reveal his plan.

I often write helpful Scriptures on index cards and carry them with me. When my thoughts become disquieted, I read the verses and ask God to help me see his perspective on waiting. In the Christian classic *Abundant Living*, author E. Stanley Jones says it's in spending quiet time with God that a Christian gains poise and power. Jones says, "One translator interprets the command, 'Be still, and know that I am God' this way: 'Be silent to God, and he will mold you.' Be silent to God, and he will make you become the instrument of his purposes. [In silence] an all-wise Mind will brood over your mind, awakening it, stimulating it, and making it creative."

When I'm silent before God, I know most vividly he hasn't deserted my friend Lisa and her husband. God has a message in your wait, and in silence you can hear it clearly.

**2. Wait hopefully.** I pull out all the stops when it comes to waiting despairingly. When my doctor leaves me a message to call his office, I panic. While dialing his number, I convince myself he's going to tell me I've contracted an incurable disease.





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When I'm called to wait, I think the worst. But the Bible reminds us to wait hopefully. "No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame ... you are God my Savior," says Psalm 25:3–5. Biblical hope isn't a wishy-washy, "I hope this will turn out for good, but maybe it won't" attitude. Biblical hope is the confident assurance that God's in charge—no matter what.

We can have the same hope the Old Testament patriarch Abraham had awaiting the fulfillment of God's promise he would become the father of many nations. The Bible says, "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed ... he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead ... yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised" (Rom. 4:18–20).

**3. Wait obediently.** As a child, I'd stealthily unwrap, then rewrap, the Christmas gifts my parents had purchased for me. I couldn't bear waiting until Christmas morning to open them! However, I've learned the only waiting that's beneficial is obedient waiting, which takes place by aligning my actions as closely as I can with scriptural principles and asking God to adjust my attitude.

My friend Lisa endures her wait, knowing its culmination most likely will happen in eternity, when Jesus wipes away her tears and relieves her husband's suffering (Rev. 21:4). Lisa says the only way to wait obediently is to focus on God. How does she do this? "When I'm overwhelmed, I cry to God in sheer desperation," she says,





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"and he always comes through. Sometimes he uses the words of a song, sometimes it's something one of my kids says. When I cry to God, he does whatever it takes to encourage me."

As we wait on God, we must stay obedient. As I wait for God to change my teen's heart, I must learn to put aside sarcasm—a tool I'm too often tempted to use—and allow God's love to work through me. When the wait's too much to bear, I surrender it to God by setting aside time to visit a scenic place—I'm partial to beaches. There I concentrate on God's magnificence, then surrender the wait to him by physically acting out the motion of handing my wait over from my hands to his. When I'm later plagued by worry or questions, I think back to the day on the beach when I surrendered the wait, and I remind myself I've given it to him. He'll come through.

Psalm 119 voices a servant's cry. The Psalm brims with the promise that those who obey God's statutes will be satisfied. They will not wait in vain. While you wait, live according to God's Word, seek him, and meditate on his message.

*Faith Tibbetts McDonald, a university writing instructor and freelance writer, lives in Pennsylvania. This article first appeared in the September/October 2002 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





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### Reflect

- *The author says that referencing Scriptures on index cards helps her to wait quietly and seek God. Would this help you? What else could you do to help you wait quietly?*
- *Psalm 38:15 says, "I wait for you, O Lord; you will answer, O Lord my God." What do you wait for? Are you confident that God will answer?*
- *Which is hardest for you: waiting quietly, waiting hopefully, or waiting obediently? Why?*



## The Power of Patience



An amazing thing can happen during your wait for things to change.

*By Stormie Omartian*

**P**atience. The very word can cause us to roll our eyes. That's because when we think of patience, we think of waiting. And we don't like to wait.

But it seems as though we're always waiting for something. Waiting for a certain thing to happen, for one thing to begin, and another to end. Waiting for more time or more money. Waiting for our marriage to get better, or for our spouse to change. Waiting for the kids to grow up. Waiting for our prayers to be answered.



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Waiting can be painful and difficult—especially when it comes to our need for change in marriage.

But God says that waiting is good. That's because it produces patience in us.

The apostle Paul tells us that patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit—in other words, patience is a byproduct of God's work within us. He describes it as "longsuffering" (Gal. 5:22, NKJV), a word that, according to Webster's dictionary, means "long and patient enduring of injury, trouble, or provocation." Can you think of a marriage that doesn't require a certain amount of "longsuffering"?

But how long are we willing to suffer provocation? How patient are we when we most need to be?

The truth is, we can't have patience without the waiting. But just because we're waiting doesn't necessarily mean we have patience. It's how we wait that's most important. Do we wait with a good attitude?

I know a couple in which the husband is always on time and his wife frequently runs late. When he taps his fingers loudly, grows angry, and paces anxiously while spewing stinging barbs, he doesn't practice patience! He's waiting, yes. But it's forced waiting, and it never accomplishes what he hopes it will. Neither does silently fuming. Patience and a good attitude go hand in hand. Patience is deciding that his mate is worth the wait and doing it calmly. On the other hand, his wife, who runs perpetually late, needs to show patience with her husband's various expressions of impatience.







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#### Pursuing Patience

Paul makes it clear that not only are we supposed to desire patience, we're to pursue it (1 Tim. 6:11). If you're like me, the thought of pursuing patience doesn't bring forth shouts of joy and excitement!

But when we chase patience, it pleases God. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:1-2: "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

So how do we pursue patience?

**Pray.** One way is to ask God for it. Prayer has an amazing way of helping us become more patient.

Let's be honest, though. Prayer is about the last thing we feel like doing when our patience is being tested, isn't it? But we can pray about whatever is causing us to be impatient. For example, my friend can pray for his wife who's always late and ask God how he can help her be on time. Maybe she's overloaded with too much to do. Or she tries to fit too much into a day. Or she's trying to be perfect. On the flip side, she can ask God to help her be better organized, or have a clearer concept of time and how much of it is needed to accomplish all she needs to do.

Whatever the case, remember that each prayer, even when it seems to be about the same old thing, has new life in it each time you pray it. Prayer sets something in motion, even your spouse—though that may not seem immediately detectable. Make a mental adjustment. I've found one of the best ways to develop patience is to think of my waiting





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times as "waiting on the Lord." So instead of waiting on my husband to change, I think of waiting on the Lord to work changes in him. And in me! That whole mind adjustment makes it much easier to be patient with my spouse. Waiting on the Lord gives me the sense that something is going on, I just can't see it at the moment. But I wait with eager anticipation to see what God is going to do.

***Be thankful.*** Every time we lose our patience, we can stop and thank God for keeping his with us. The apostle Paul reminds us: "Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus" (Rom. 15:5, NKJV). We can thank him for his desire and willingness to give us the peace that passes all understanding, and for helping us rest in his perfect timing. If we are to "consider it pure joy" when we go through trials (James 1:2), how much more are we to do that in the daily trials that occur in our lives?

***Don't give up.*** Patience means learning not to give up—like when it looks as though your spouse is never going to change, or when it seems as if the things that bother you are never going to be any different. My husband's anger was always the biggest problem for me in our marriage. I came into the marriage with a lot of hurt from the past, and his temper caused me to hurt even more and withdraw from him.

Because anger is a hard habit to break, especially when a person has entertained it for a long time, things grew only worse as time went on. But as I learned to react less and not take each angry outburst personally, and as I learned





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to pray more for him about every aspect of his life, I saw God make changes in my husband that I could never have imagined. His anger gradually manifested less and less frequently and intensely.

Whenever you're faced with an impossibly tenacious and irritating trait in your mate, turn to God and praise him as the God of the impossible. Thank him that because all things are possible with him (Mark 10:27), you know that only he can make changes that last in your marriage. Invite him to do just that.

**Grow your faith.** Patience means working on growing deeper in your relationship with God. The most important reason to pursue patience is that it's one of God's attributes. When we're patient, we're more like him. The apostle James writes that the testing of our faith produces patience, and patience perfects us and makes us complete so that we lack nothing (James 1:2-4).

If that's true, then we can be grateful whenever our spouse is late, or irritating us in some way, because he or she is helping to perfect us. Through practicing patience with our spouse, our mate is helping us become more like Christ! So each time you find yourself in a situation where you have to make yourself pursue patience, try to think about how perfect and godlike you're becoming. It really helps.

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### Reflect

- *How do you respond to periods of waiting in your life? How could you respond with patience?*
- *Do you make the most of opportunities to grow deeper in your relationship with God when your patience is tested? How?*
- *Think about God's patience. 2 Peter 3:15 says, "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation." What does the Lord's patience working in you bring about?*



## When God Seems Silent

What to do when life is dark and heaven's quiet.

*By Verla Gillmor*



**N**ot too long ago, it seemed as though God had packed up, moved far away, and left me no forwarding address. I was unable to sense his promptings and overall presence as I searched for him during trying times. I felt abandoned, confused, and terribly alone.





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The year actually had started out on an opposite note. In January, I'd realized a lifelong dream—the publication of my first book. The spring months were jammed with talk show interviews and a stepped-up speaking schedule. Blessings were everywhere. In the midst of it all, God gave me a vision to start a new ministry for Christians in the workplace. I was on a roll.

With great excitement, I raced through all the open doors. My quiet times were rich, God's directions were clear, and all the lights were green. As long as God kept guiding, directing, leading, and blessing, I felt I could handle all the pressure and change.

Then, a recession in the summer of 2001 slowed my small consulting business. I was worried because I now had the added expenses of launching a new ministry. I hoped that by fall, everything would be back to normal. Little did I know the events of September 11th were right around the corner.

After 9-11, "bad-to-worse" took on a whole new meaning. The economy reeled. Clients stopped paying their bills and called off future projects. Speaking engagements were canceled. The stress caused my fibromyalgia to flare and a relentless cycle of pain, fatigue, and depression followed. To top it all off, my health insurance provider filed for bankruptcy.

Daily I approached God with growing concern. "Okay, God, I'm sure you've got a plan. Show me what I'm supposed to do here. I need you now more than ever. I'm a middle-aged woman on my own. I'm physically hurting, emotionally spent. How should I deal with this?"







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The silence was deafening.

My prayers became more strident: "God, this is not the time to play hide-and-seek. I'm facing some serious anxiety here. Now would be an especially good time to hear from you!"

For more than two decades, the Holy Spirit had filled my head and heart with comfort, encouragement, leadings, inklings, instructions—even in the rockiest of times. But for the next six months, God was totally mute.

What's going on when God's silence seems palpable? What on earth is he up to? The hard reality is, some things are best learned in the dark. Here's what God taught me through that tough time of his silence.

### **Silence Is Not Absence**

I come from a long line of "talkers." When I was growing up, our house was quiet only when no one was home. I recall one time chattering to God about my endless litany of needs and wants, ending with, "Are you listening, God?" As clearly as if he were sitting next to me in the flesh, I heard him say in my spirit, Yes, child, I'm listening. Would you like to listen for awhile?

I got the message. Over the years, I practiced listening more to God's voice. But nothing prepared me for his silence!

On more than one occasion, Old Testament King David felt abandoned by God. But he knew that despite his feelings, he was never out of God's sight: "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ...





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If I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you" (Ps. 139:7, 9–12).

David reassures us that we are not alone. God is relentlessly faithful. So how do we convince our frightened hearts when life crumbles around us and God becomes silent? We enter into the silence with him.

The spiritual opportunity: Solitude. You have to feel totally accepted and comfortable with someone to sit with a person in silence. It can be intimidating. Silence shifts the emphasis of a relationship away from words and transactions to intimacy where no words are necessary. Are you that comfortable with God? Would you like to be?

Since I felt my many words were fruitless, I sat in my favorite chair, read a brief portion of Scripture, or listened to a worship tape to calm my heart. Then I'd simply say, "Lord, I'm here and I'm scared. Please let me feel your presence." And I would sit ... in silence. Sometimes I cried. Eventually my spirit calibrated to God's and peace settled over me—enough peace to get me through another day. When all the racket of life stops and God's presence fills every molecule of space around us, our hearts grow calm and strong. Fear seems pointless. Circumstances lose their power over us. The silence becomes an opportunity to fall in love with the person of Christ, rather than the things he says or does for us.





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### Silence Checks Our Trust Level

There's not much trust required if someone stands beside us coaching us every inch of the way. It's like a parent running alongside a child who's learning to ride a bicycle. We want to know the parent is there because we have no confidence we can ride the bike alone. But we'd look pretty silly if we were 40 and mom or dad was still running alongside our bike.

At some point in our journey with him, God may decide to take his hand off the bike, so to speak, to see if we remember what we've learned. It's preparation for the road ahead, which may be bumpy or difficult. It's God taking us to the next level, building our commitment and perseverance. It's also a way to reveal those things we're trusting in more than him.

For years my friend Esther prayed for a spouse, and God seemed to ignore her. "My heart's desire always has been to marry a preacher and to minister together," she says. "But when I hit 30 and there was no husband on the horizon, I kept asking God, 'Why am I not married? Is there something wrong with me?' There was no response. It hurt."

Then one day Esther had an "aha!" moment. "I realized I was trusting marriage and a husband to give my life meaning more than I was trusting God to do it. I had made marriage a litmus test of God's love for me."

The spiritual opportunity: Surrender. Esther surrendered her marriage agenda to God and gave him permission to do whatever he wanted with her life. Suddenly a whole





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world of opportunity opened for her. Today she travels the globe training pastors and children's ministry leaders.

"I'm doing exciting things now I couldn't have done if I were married. And I learned I didn't have to marry to do ministry. I haven't permanently said good-bye to marriage. God didn't tell me I'd never marry. But I had to learn God's plan for my life involved more than just marriage." Esther's breakthrough came as a result of God's silence.

Jesus understood this principle. The most significant events in his life took place in the dark when all he saw was God's back. Yet his instructions to his disciples were unwavering: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me" (John 14:1).

Every day God calls us to keep trusting—to get out of bed and spend another 24 hours washing dishes, doing laundry, loving our family, believing he has everything under control—even when he seems silent.

### **Silence Doesn't Mean Nothing's Happening**

Ever try to watch a seed grow? The problem is, you can't. It remains hidden under the dark garden soil until the seedling's ready to break the surface and appear.

Sometimes things buried in us need to surface, but they'll only do so after we sit still long enough to let them break through. Perhaps they're deep issues that have undermined our lives for years. Silence forces them to emerge.





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One of the old issues that surfaced for me was a fear of financial meltdown. When I was a child, my father had more financial ups and downs than a roller-coaster ride. So my precarious circumstances triggered my preoccupation with feeling financially insecure. I was looking for quick answers to calm my fears, but God wanted me to wrestle with a much bigger issue: Who, exactly, was my provider? Was it my clients—or God? Of course God expected me to work hard and do my part. But if I was doing the best I could, what could I expect in return?

**The spiritual opportunity: Scripture Memorization.** God's silence and my situation drove me deeper into his Word to search for what I could expect of God in circumstances such as my own. In spiritual desperation, I had to break a sweat and dig. I selected comforting promises, recorded them on 3x5-inch cards, and taped them everywhere—on my bathroom mirror, on my dashboard, over the kitchen sink. And I prayed the promises back to God: "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread" (Ps. 37:25); and "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. ... Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matt. 6:25–26).

When I thought nothing was happening, God, in fact, had me in training. You pay more attention when you're lost in a wilderness. I'd only been interested in quick fixes. But God was building my character and making me more effective for the kingdom. He can do the same for you.





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### Silence Forces Us to Get Real with God

My friend Mikki had been married 13 years when she sensed a growing chasm between her husband and her. "It was as though someone put a glass wall between us," she says. "I could see my husband and hear him, but I couldn't feel him." Her husband denied there was a problem.

For eight years Mikki asked God to reveal what was going on and to make her the wife her husband needed. While God related to her deeply and intimately about every other thing in her life, he was totally silent about her marriage.

"It was a torturous time," Mikki says. "But it brought me to a place of brokenness before the Lord. I couldn't make God tell me what was happening to my marriage. I couldn't make him fix it. I believe he was teaching me to give up control and submit to his timing and plans."

Eventually her husband's eight-year-long affair came to light and he filed for divorce. When the truth was revealed, Mikki snapped in anger at God. "I thought if I was faithful, surely God would restore my marriage," she says. "I remember throwing my Bible on the shelf and saying, 'I'm done with you, God. Stay out of my life!' Sometimes you have to get raw and real with God. If something hard has happened, it's okay to be honest with him."

The spiritual opportunity: Authenticity and Community. To my friend Mikki's surprise, getting real with God brought her closer to him. Almost right away Mikki was able to confess to God she was sorry for blaming him. After all, he was the only one who had ever loved Mikki unconditionally. Christian friends then came alongside to see her through







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the hard part of rebuilding her life. They reminded her repeatedly of what was true and false about her and about God. But mostly they loved her, listened to her, and gave her the gift of their presence.

"I remember sitting on the floor crying at a friend's house. I said, 'I'm trusting you to trust the Lord for me for now—to have hope until I get mine back.' The verse I clung to was Psalm 119:50: 'My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.'"

When God falls silent, how long will the silence last? It takes as long as it takes—and it will seem dark and lonely the whole time. But in the same way dawn always follows night, so, too, your darkness will end.

For me, the silence ended as unexpectedly as it began. While waiting to hear from God, I noticed my prayers became less about getting answers than about connecting with God himself. I remember when I first realized I was receiving a fresh word from God—the first word I'd heard in a long time. One day as I was journaling, I felt the Holy Spirit gently ask whether scaring myself about all the "what ifs" had done any good other than to scare me. He reminded me I'll have everything I need to live the life he's called me to live. If a need isn't met, then maybe it wasn't a real need, or something I wasn't supposed to be doing in the first place.

The message was a precious sign God had been at work—shaping me even when he seemed far away. And so the two of us began again the daily conversations that would see me into the future he had planned for me.





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When God Seems Silent

If you let God's silence do its work, you will come out the other side knowing that you're not alone, that God longs for deeper intimacy with you, that he's worth trusting for the journey, and that you're stronger than ever.

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## Reflect

- *The author asks, "Silence shifts the emphasis of a relationship away from words and transactions to intimacy where no words are necessary. Are you that comfortable with God? Would you like to be?"*
- *Do you mistake God's silence for inactivity? Besides the illustration of a growing seed, what other examples of God working, despite outward appearances, can you think of?*
- *When silence comes, do you run to or away from God? When was the last time you were honest with God during a period of silence?*





## The Edge of Expectation

What I've discovered through  
the act of waiting.

*By Cindy Crosby*

**T**he first time I saw them, it was broad daylight. Lying on my back on the limestone ledge of the prairie, I contemplated random black dots floating on a skyblue backdrop, sprinkled like pepper on the puffy cumulus clouds. Some of the black dots circled in a pattern. Birds, I surmised, flying high. Red-tailed hawks—that would make sense. Yet it continued to gnaw at me: I'd seen red-tails enough to know intuitively when something wasn't a red-tail.





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I pulled out my binoculars and continued to study the moving black dots. There were periodic white flashes as they circled in the sun. Gulls, I hypothesized again, but then these didn't look like gulls, either. When you've seen the ordinary enough, you're jarred by the extraordinary.

Soon the dots disappeared from binocular range. The sky remained blankly blue. I stayed on the limestone ledge for another hour, longing to receive a little resolution.

Lately I've spent my evenings waiting for the mysterious birds. They don't always turn up; I live on the edge of expectation. When the sun disappears below the horizon, I'm often left with only my disappointment at an empty sky. But it's worth risking disappointment for chance epiphanies.

### Lessons in Patience

Waiting is an open-ended exercise that I've been cultivating without a lot of direction these days. On the surface, it's a passive concept. But the more time I devote to waiting, the more I feel immersed in prayer. Waiting—instead of busying myself telling God what I need and when I need it. Remaining still.

In the evenings, I head toward my waiting spot on the prairie, looking for this stillness. No phones ring, no one asks me to do anything. I walk, and sit, and look, and listen. Finding freedom in the waiting.





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Some waiting I do is fraught with anxiety. I'm waiting for my 83-year-old grandfather's body to make up its mind if he will heal or die. He lies in the nursing home with a feeding tube, his body wasted, unable to sit up or even speak much. Waiting. And we wait with him.

In the daytime I manage to ward off these thoughts by keeping myself busy, but when I wait in that mysterious time between light and dark, buried emotions often surface. As the prairie grasses catch the final rays of sun and flare for a moment, my unconscious thoughts are illuminated for a short time. I'm learning I pray best for my grandfather by making this time to wait.

As I wait, I also receive. This doesn't suit me well; I always try to be the first to give, to stay one step ahead. If a friend buys me lunch, I make sure I buy the next time. I live in horror of the scales being tipped in the wrong direction. It's safer to keep others obligated to me.

Yet to accept God's grace is to live in eternal debt. It demands that I wait, that I acknowledge I'll never even things up. I practice solitude, which means staying open to receive. Making time to be alone. Putting things on hold.

A chipmunk skitters along the ledge, then slips beneath the stones. The wind shimmies lightly through the tender foliage under the trees, now blackened by frost. Waiting here has caused a quiet peace to spread over my life. I'm more centered these days, less frantic, less blown





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about by stressful events and difficult decisions. Naming my fears, naming my longings, releases them to God in some way I don't understand completely. I only know that waiting here alone, night after night, quenches a nagging, unnamed thirst.

This aloneness gives room for listening. My prayer life has been full of telling God what I want. Petitioning. Reacting to illness, to death, to difficulty. "Protect my kids." "Help me with the difficult assignment." "Give us peace." Now I'm waiting, for what I'm not sure. I'm looking for something intangible; I trust I'll know it when I find it.

### **A Fruitful Search**

You don't always discover what you look for, I know: I searched the prairie floor in vain last spring for the killdeer's nest. I rummaged through the trees for the oriole's hammock without results. But the joy I feel when I find what I've looked long and hard for is worth days and nights of fruitless searching. And often, moments of great happiness and understanding take me unawares when I'm not looking. Perhaps the act of waiting is itself what I've been searching for.

This is new for me, and new insights are always a bit of a shock. But I want to be caught off guard, jolted from the ordinary. Surprise me. I'm willing to wait for the unexpected.

It came to pass that as I waited, evening after evening, I forgot about the circling black spots in the sky. Once I stopped looking for them, they found me. One evening





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as I gazed up into a bur oak, the first nighthawk crossed the prairie at treetop range. Then another. Six that night. They moved quickly, silently slicing through space, the white bars under their wings a tip-off. Later at home, I paged through my bird book and the puzzle pieces dropped satisfactorily into place. White bars. High flyers. Dark wings. Nighthawks.

Surprisingly, I've found my epiphany may be considered common to others. Some business associates and I were chatting over coffee about the landscapes of our youth. One told how she was reared in the Arizona desert and hated the heat and bleak landscape. When she was transplanted to Michigan, she fell in love with the snow and ice. "The best thing about the Midwest is the beautiful cardinals and blue jays," she said. "I was tired of sparrows and nighthawks."

I looked at her, aghast. Tired of nighthawks? What I found so rare, and worth waiting for? I'd had my fill of cardinals and blue jays—they were as ordinary to me as white bread. But my nighthawks were as trite to her as a painting of Elvis on black velvet.

We don't consistently see beauty in the same places. What I wait for in expectation is something another may have in full, and what I take for granted, another may long for.

### **Beyond Expectation**

I wait, expecting. It's right before dusk. The sun drops behind a cloud; shadows vanish. Suddenly the first nighthawk cuts across the sky, then another, then another. Most nights it's been six or eight; tonight I count ten







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nighthawks. Twenty. Twentyfive. I count as fast as I can but lose track at thirty-eight. They speed in, a veritable fleet, whirling, wheeling sharply, nose-diving.

I drink my fill, and still they come. Dizzy, I realize I'm holding my breath. My cup runneth over with nighthawks. God's unexpected extravagances—why give me one nighthawk tonight when the dusk can overflow with them, spill over the top, and run down the sides? Why does this astonish me?

God, what is this mystery? That I wait, and you fill the waiting with something beautiful, yet previously unknown to me? That we are here to wait at all, and then we vanish without a trace, frost melting on glass?

As a species, the nighthawks are declining. I'm the only one I know who watches for them. If they were gone, would anyone else wait? Would it be enough if there were only one person waiting for them, one person who would count the sky emptier when they were gone?

Is the act of waiting enough?

If I'm not waiting, I miss the best moments. I skim my life's surface without ever taking the full plunge into the depths. I'm willing to take the risk. To be silent and to wait. To listen. To stay open to receive.

More often than not, I think, the nighthawks are around me, cruising at high altitudes out of my range of vision. The angle of light often makes them invisible, much as a spider web slung between branches and glistening with





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dew disappears when the sun passes behind a cloud. Sometimes I receive extravagantly, other times I'm left with an empty sky. And often I only get flashes of white, glimpses of what I wait for. Coming down to earth—when? I don't know. But much of what I wait for is here, ready to be tapped into if I'm present for it.

Let the nighthawks come. I'm waiting.

*Excerpted from By Willoway Brook (2003) by Cindy Crosby. Used with permission from Paraclete Press. This article appeared in the January/February 2004 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

## Reflect

- *The author writes, "The more time I devote to waiting, the more I feel immersed in prayer. Waiting—instead of busying myself telling God what I need and when I need it. Remaining still." How does this compare to your experience of waiting?*
- *In what ways does waiting keep you open to receive from God?*
- *Are you willing, like the author, "to take the risk. To be silent and to wait. To listen"? Why or why not?*





## Prayers That Move the Heart of God

How to cultivate a meaningful conversation with the Lord.

*By Nancy Guthrie*

**M**y teenaged son, Matt, always has a great time when he visits my parents. And why shouldn't he? Matt gets out of bed whenever he wants, eats whatever he wants, and watches whatever he wants on TV. In fact, Matt made a grand discovery at Grandma's house during his last visit. My mother keeps a bucket of chocolate chip cookie dough in her refrigerator that Matt enjoyed eating by the spoonful! When he returned from that visit, he began asking me to buy cookie dough from Sam's Club, just like my mom.



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I know having cookie dough easily available isn't good for either of us, so I said "no" over and over—until last week. Matt's repeated requests finally wore me down.

That's one of the big differences between God's parenting and mine. God doesn't give me everything I repeatedly ask for when he knows it's not best for me. But a shallow reading of Luke 11:9–10 could lead me to think otherwise. There Jesus says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

Is the way to get what I want from God through wearing him down, or getting as many people as possible to ask God for it? What kinds of prayer *really* move the heart and hand of God?

#### **Secret-Formula Prayer vs. Seeking Prayer**

As his parent, I don't want Matt to try to get what he wants by constantly begging me for it or getting everyone he knows to gang up on me. I want to hear his heart on the matter, and I want him to hear mine. I want us to have a *conversation*. Isn't that how it is with our heavenly Father? Prayer is about a conversation with our loving God—not about wearing him down to get what we want.

There's so much to want—healed bodies, restored relationships, changed circumstances. But asking, seeking, and knocking aren't secret formulas for getting what we want *from* God; they're ways to get more *of* God. As I listen to God speak to me through his Word, he gives me more of himself in fuller, newer ways. Then, if healing doesn't come, if the relationship remains broken, or if the pressures increase, I





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have the opportunity to discover for myself he is enough. His presence is enough. His purpose is enough.

If you truly want to move God's heart, put aside secret-formula prayer and instead begin to practice prayer that seeks the Giver more than the gifts.

#### **Superficial Prayer vs. Significant Prayer**

Sometimes I catch myself "chatting" with God, limiting my prayers to superficial things and surface issues, never getting to the heart of the matter. And I've noticed that when others offer prayer requests, they're rarely about spiritual needs. We ask God to heal physical ailments, provide safe travel, and to "be with us."

Of course God cares about these things. But prayer is spiritual work toward a spiritual end. God wants to rub off our rough edges and clean up our character. So why do we settle for talking to him only about the superficial stuff? When our prayers move from the superficial to the significant, we invite God to do no less than a deep, transforming, igniting work in our life and in the lives of those for whom we're praying.

I've often found myself slipping into superficial mode in my prayers for Matt—asking God to keep him safe or to bless his day at school. But I really don't want to settle for those things. So my prayers have moved from the superficial to the significant. I'm asking God to shape Matt's character—even if it requires some struggle. I'm begging the Holy Spirit to ignite in Matt a passion for holiness and a love for God's Word. These are things that really matter. This is what significant prayer is all about.





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Prayers That Move the Heart of God

### Showy Prayer vs. Secret Prayer

Several years ago, at a friend's wedding, a college friend described me to her other friends as "a prayer warrior." Her comment surprised me because I knew it wasn't true. I guess I'd made a great impression with my public prayers at our weekly Bible study group in college. But the truth was, there wasn't much private prayer going on in my life.

If I'm not careful, I still can make prayer all about impressing others with my pseudospirituality. That's "showy prayer"—prayer that's more for others' ears than for God's. Jesus warned against this: "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the doors and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:5–6).

Showy prayer uses put-on voices, lofty words, and spiritual-sounding phrases; simple prayer is authentic and humble. I can perform public prayers or make claims of private prayer, and settle for the applause of people; or I can go to a secret place, shut the door, and commune with God. It's in that secret place with him you and I find our most blessed reward—not impressing others, but cultivating true intimacy with him.

### Insistent Prayer vs. Submissive Prayer

Nothing's taught me more about prayer than Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. According to Hebrews





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5:7–8, "during the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered."

This moves me, because I know what it's like to offer prayers with loud cries and tears, to come before God with a broken heart and a desperate need. Several years ago, physicians told my husband and me that because of a rare metabolic disorder, our newborn daughter, Hope, would live for only two or three months.

Time seemed to be slipping away so quickly when one day, as I rocked Hope in the nursery we'd prepared for her—tears spilling down my face—I thought, *I'll ask God to give Hope more time*. It seemed such a modest prayer; I'd already surrendered any insistence God heal her completely. But even as that prayer formed in my mind, I sensed God calling me to submit to his perfect timing. So my prayer instead became, *Give me strength to make the most of every day you give me with Hope. Show me how to rest in your plan for her life and mine*.

In Hope's life and death, I learned what it is to pray to a God who has the power to make another way, but chooses not to. It helps to know Jesus understands what this feels like. Like Jesus, I've wrestled with God's plan for my life even as I've sought to submit to it. But Jesus shows me how to obey when God's answer to my sincere, reverent prayer is "no." I also see Jesus' example of obedience.







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I've learned that submissive prayer is prayer that welcomes God to work in and through my suffering rather than begs him to take it away. It's thanking God for what he gives me rather than resenting him for what I lose. Submissive prayer is changing me from someone who knew a lot about God into someone who's experiencing God in deep, though sometimes difficult, ways.

Too often I still find myself merely going through the motions of prayer, but I want to pray in a way that's authentic, sincere, and effective. I'm learning to go to my heavenly Father in the way I want my son to come to me. I want to hear what Matt wants and needs. I want to respond. I want to be active in his life, doing what I know is best for him.

Our heavenly Father's no different. He has no need for a show or secret formulas, and he's not interested in keeping things superficial. He loves it when we come to him—and he simply wants to talk with us.

*Nancy Guthrie is the author of Holding On to Hope: A Pathway Through Suffering to the Heart of God and The One Year Book of Hope (both Tyndale). She lives in Tennessee. This article first appeared in the March/April 2006 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





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Prayers That Move the Heart of God

### Reflect

- *Nancy describes four types of "rival" prayers. Where do you fall in each category?*
- *How does that category of prayer affect your relationship with God?*
- *With her daughter's life and death, Nancy writes, "I learned what it is to pray to a God who has the power to make another way, but chooses not to." When have you experienced that?*



## Is That You, God?



Learning to recognize  
his voice.

*By Alicia Bruxvoort*

I was curled up on the corner of our plaid couch, seizing the early-morning silence to talk with God, when my son's warm body cuddling next to mine interrupted the conversation. I opened my eyes to greet Lukas with a hug.

"Mommy?" he whispered. "Are you talking to God?"



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"Yes, honey," I replied as I kissed his tousled hair, "I am." I closed my eyes to continue my prayer.

Soon, a curious voice interrupted, "Mom?"

"Yes, Lukas?"

"Does God talk back?"

My heart responded long before my mouth formed the words: "Yes, buddy, God talks back."

Lukas's blue eyes grew wide as he stammered, "But how do you know it's him?"

Help me, Lord, I prayed silently, attempting to formulate an answer. How could I explain recognizing God's voice when I was still discovering it for myself?

I've been a believer since I was ten, and I've always loved the Bible stories that portray a relational God. I knew God spoke to Mary through an angel and to the apostle Paul through a blinding light; I believed he longed to speak to me as well. But as I grew older, my childlike confidence faltered. How could I discern God's gentle whispers from my desires masquerading as godly guidance?

### A Divine Progression

In his book *The Pursuit of God*, A.W. Tozer describes how the average person learns to recognize God's voice: "First, a sound as a presence walking in the garden. Then a voice, more intelligible but still far from clear.





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Then the happy moment when the Spirit begins to illuminate the Scriptures and that which had only been a sound or at best a voice now becomes an intelligible word, warm and intimate and as clear as the word of a dear friend."

A few years ago, after moving to a new community, I answered the phone and heard a vaguely familiar voice invite my children and me to the park. Not wanting to embarrass myself or the mystery caller, I asked for directions and hoped I'd recognize her face once I got to the park. Sure enough, as my children tumbled out of the van, I spotted a woman I'd met at church.

A-ha! I thought as I returned her friendly wave. So it was her!

My first encounters with God's voice were much like fielding that phone call from a vaguely familiar friend. My heart felt his "gentle nudge," but I was unable to decipher specifics. I proceeded in faith and hoped to recognize God more clearly in the process.

While seeking our first jobs out of college, my husband and I stumbled upon an opportunity to teach in Austria. We prayed for wisdom and eventually felt God give us the go-ahead. We accepted the job, moved overseas, and anticipated a romantic European adventure.

Months later, isolated by language barriers and weary from challenging job conditions, we questioned if we'd heard God correctly. Only in retrospect did we recognize the ways God used that experience to solidify





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our young marriage and prepare us for the difficult years to come, as Rob's commitment to medical school (which coincided with our initiation into parenthood) required long hours. With hindsight, we recognized God's purpose for our time in Austria and finally said with confidence, "So it was him!"

### The Right Question

One winter day, I met a friend for lunch at McDonald's. In the midst of refreshing "grown-up talk," I heard a familiar high-pitched cry from the noisy crowd of preschoolers swarming the play area.

"That's Lizzy," I told my friend.

"How do you know?" she asked skeptically. "There's gotta be two dozen kids over there."

"But that's her," I said resolutely as I slipped off my shoes and maneuvered through the tunnels from which my daughter's cries had come. Following the desperate voice, I found my two-year-old hovering at the top of the play structure. With reassuring words, I coaxed her to safety.

While I wouldn't have recognized the cries of my best friend's child, I quickly picked out my daughter's voice. It's because I've listened to Lizzy since she squealed rejoiced at the first words that rolled off her toddler tongue. Her voice is a regular part of my days.

Similarly, the more I make Jesus a regular part of my days, the more I recognize his voice. Jesus explained this principle in John 10: "I am the good shepherd; I know





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my sheep and my sheep know me ... My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (vv. 14, 27). As my relationship with the Lord has grown, I've realized the real question of recognizing his voice isn't "How do you know it's him?" but rather, "How well do you know him?"

### Going Deep

Recently I browsed some letters I wrote when I was engaged to my husband, Rob. I chuckled at my attempts to put into words what he meant to me after three years of courtship. My definition of who Rob was then seems shallow in contrast to who I know him to be now.

My relationship with God is much the same. As a young believer, I viewed God primarily as my Savior, but over time, he's proven himself to be much more. As a lonely young educator in a foreign country, God stepped in as my Friend. During the times I handled our family's finances and the money was short, God became my Provider. Through years of sharing my life with God, I've gotten to know greater depths of his character.

In *Breaking Free*, Bible teacher Beth Moore writes, "We can't always know the mind of God, but we can always know the heart of God." As I listen for his voice, I'm learning to evaluate what I hear with who I know my Lord to be.

### Listening Through Scripture

In *The Power of a Praying Woman*, Stormie Omartian writes, "One of the most priceless gems you will find in God's Word is his voice. That's because he speaks to







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us through his Word as we read it or hear it. In fact, we can't really learn to recognize God's voice to our soul if we are not hearing him speak to us first in his Word."

Recently, my husband and I grappled with a possible relocation. "God," I cried out one day while on a walk. "I want our family to land exactly where you want us. But I can't figure out where that is!" Then I reached into my pocket for the memory verses I'd grabbed before heading out the door. As soon as my eyes fell on the words, I began to cry. "If you make the Most High your dwelling ... then no harm will befall you. ... For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways" (Ps. 91:9–11). God was talking directly to my restless heart that morning. It doesn't matter where you move, he assured me. Just make me your home, and I'll take care of you.

Meeting God daily on the pages of his Word enables me to recognize him "off the pages" as well. When I keep my mind fixed on Scripture as I go about my day, my heart remains still before the Lord (Ps. 46:10) even amidst deadlines, carpools, and screaming toddlers.

### **A Matter of Time**

When my second child started preschool, I suddenly gained two hours of free time. I immediately filled them with an ambitious to-do list and Friday-morning coffee dates with friends. One day as I squeezed in a quick prayer time before racing my daughter off to preschool, I felt the Lord prompting, Let me be your coffee date. At first I struggled over exchanging some activity-filled mornings for prayer and Bible reading, but I've found the rewards to be priceless.





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Shortly after I started my coffee dates with God, he graciously began to answer petitions I'd been praying for years. My six-year-old son who had grappled with anger began to show signs of a softening heart. My four-year-old daughter began to tell me about her "special ears" that listened to Jesus. My husband, who rarely showed interest in praying aloud together, began to wake me in the middle of the night to pray over our children. Needless to say, my coffee dates with God are now a favorite part of my week!

The squeeze of a little hand reminded me my son was still waiting for an answer.

"So how do you know it's God?" Lukas persisted.

"Remember when we were at that playground filled with lots of people and Daddy went to the parking lot to get the car?" I asked.

"Uh-huh?"

"Could you see Daddy from where you sat on the swings?"

"No."

"Well, how did you know it was Dad when he called your name and said it was time to go?"

"Mo-om," he said with a giggle and a hint of exasperation, "He's my daddy. I just know him!"





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"You know what, buddy?" I replied. "That's how it is with God, too!"

*Alicia Bruxvoort is a writer and speaker who lives in Iowa. This article first appeared in the May/June 2006 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

### Reflect

- *Think of a time when you unmistakably heard God's voice speaking to you. What were the circumstances and how did you know it was him?*
- *The author writes, "Meeting God daily on the pages of his Word enables me to recognize him 'off the pages' as well." How does being quiet and waiting patiently for God relate to learning his voice?*



## God's Talking to You!

Can you hear him?

*By Virelle Kidder*



I locked the upstairs bathroom door as the happy voices of our visiting kids and grandkids rang out from the kitchen below. Tears outlined the strangely fallen features on the right side of my face as I studied myself in the mirror. Bell's palsy, a paralysis that distorts expressions on one side of the face, was in its second swipe since my teen years—and it had returned with a vengeance. Painful swelling exploded behind my right ear, an exhausting business schedule loomed ahead, and I couldn't speak, smile, or even eat without drooling.



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"What are you trying to tell me, Lord? You've got my attention," I sniffed at the rednosed, pathetic face staring back at me. Wiping away my tears on the sleeve of my robe, I asked him point-blank, "What is it you want me to hear?"

It's taken me years to recognize God's voice: those whispered words of encouragement when I'm down; that sudden sense of caution when I'm ready to launch a testy zinger at someone; those much-needed directions at the street corners of my life; tender words of love when I least deserve them; even humor at odd moments. Why is it so surprising that the Living Word, the Author of Life, wants his children to know his thoughts? I've found God sends us his messages in a variety of ways. Here are four ways to hear his voice.

***I. God's life-changing Word.*** I haven't always heard God speak to me. In fact, there was a time when God seemed silent. Even distant. The busyness of caring for four children and fulfilling church commitments conspired to dull any sense of God's voice. Boredom and its cousins, crabbiness and depression, left my soul to dry rot. I wasn't much fun to live with, and I knew it. Each time I yelled a sharp word, I thought, Steve and the kids will just have to understand. I'm having a bad day today. I hoped God wasn't paying much attention.

Then one morning I awoke with a start. Was one of our kids awake early? No, it was just me. Or was it? I felt compelled to go downstairs without even grabbing a robe. Shivering from the early morning chill, I spread an afghan around me and settled on the couch. There was





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my Bible, untouched for weeks, beside the couch. Picking it up with a twinge of guilt, I looked for an easy place to open and read something ... safe. I chose the book of Proverbs and the day's date, the 29th. The first verse froze me: "A man (or woman) who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy."

Was this for me? Was God telling me something about my lousy attitude? Tears welled quickly, as they often do when God speaks. Who can listen casually to something he says? I cried buckets and poured out honest words for the first time in months, telling God how sorry I was for ignoring him, for not bringing him all my needs, all my hunger. Having gorged myself on self-pity, I'd starved my soul. I begged forgiveness for all the miserable words I'd spoken or even thought. The relief was immediate.

Jesus gained victory over temptation in his wilderness and told us how: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Without listening to God's voice in his Word, I soon would starve to death, and that death would affect everyone around me. I became hungry again to hear God in every circumstance of life, beginning with the first moments of every day.

Many years later, I still curl up every morning on the couch with a cup of coffee, my favorite afghan, and my Bible. Opening it, I enter his presence quietly, ready to listen. I marvel at the unplumbed depth of God's love, the treasures that wait to be discovered in knowing him.





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Life passes remarkably fast. I know God has said many things to me I've missed. I'm listening harder now, more delighted with his voice, just like the prophet Jeremiah, who exclaimed, "When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight" (Jer. 15:16).

**2. God's breathtaking world.** Even after 20 years of crossing the lake in our 14-foot boat to get to our wilderness camp in the Adirondack mountains, I still say, "Wow! Look at Whiteface today!" whenever the towering mountain comes into view. But I expect it; I'm ready to be amazed before I get into the boat. It's the "wows!" I never expect that leave me breathless, such as the stunning gift of a double rainbow at the ocean shore this past summer, or the nose-to-nose meeting with a hummingbird on my deck—gifts of love along my path. Even his little creatures show me a humorous side of our Creator.

One hot afternoon while on vacation in the Caribbean, my husband, Steve, and I sat at an outdoor café cooling off with a large lemonade. Suddenly a bright green lizard about ten inches tall appeared under an empty table next to us. At first it looked like a cartoon lizard. Then it scared me.

"Steve! Look at that!" I gasped, gripping the table. "Do you think it's dangerous?"

"I don't think so. Just stay still and see what it does," Steve answered in his calm, I-have-everything-under-control voice. That's when the lizard cocked his head and winked at us, as though he knew something we didn't know. And for the next 20 minutes, he engaged our full







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attention. We photographed him, laughed and talked to him like two kids. Soon a large crowd of onlookers gathered, some belly-down on the pavement, snapping photos. Instantly, the lizard winked good-bye and disappeared up a nearby palm tree.

Just when I think I've got God's world thoroughly appreciated and somewhat discovered, he stuns me with a message from a lizard: You haven't even brushed the surface of my glory yet, Virelle. I have more, far more in this world to show you. Just wait!

**3. God's voice through others' mouths.** Far more often than the rebuke I deserve, God has used others to speak words of affirmation and encouragement into my life when I least expect it. Imagine my shock when a woman rushed up to me after a speaking engagement to say, "You have such a gentle, quiet spirit!" I felt completely the opposite. Was God telling me he was pleased with my efforts to keep my mouth shut more often until I was sure of what he wanted me to say? Imagine that! I felt as though I'd received a hug from God and that he'd encouraged me to keep listening and trying to obey what I heard.

Others are usually the first to sense our spiritual gifts, the abilities God's given us supernaturally when we first began to place our faith in him. Has more than one person told you what a good teacher you are? God's telling you he's given you the gift of teaching. Are you the first to notice what others need, the significant little things that make their lives easier? Then thank God for the gift of help and encouragement and ask him to show





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you ways to exercise it. If you're not sure what your gifts are, ask him. God will waste no time sending someone to tell you.

When our pastor wrote me a note in bold handwriting one day, "Virelle, God wired you up to be a speaker. Never doubt that," I believed him. In fact, I taped his note to my wall, and on days when I feel overwhelmed and tired, when nothing I say seems worth listening to, I read that note and thank God for telling my pastor to write it.

**4. *God's quiet whispers.*** That morning when I stared into the mirror at my lopsided face, I decided to stay put until I heard God speak. I knew he would, but I wasn't sure how, or when, or through whom. Waiting is what I least like about following God. It's unnatural for someone whose planner is full. Virelle, came a soft whisper to my heart, I was wondering. Will you still praise me with only half a mouth? God's question cut deep through every thread of vanity left in my over-50 frame. Would I be willing to carry God's love to others when I looked strange, drooling and garbling words? Could I be his funny little messenger—just because he sent me?

"Yes, Lord," I said reluctantly, knowing I might be saying "yes" to long-term paralysis. Then, Virelle, will you remember that I never give you more than I equip you to do? In my office, a mammoth wall calendar filled with daily "must do's" spoke of my doubt that I ever could complete all God seemed to require of me. My face hot with shame, I whispered, "Yes, Lord."





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Then, Virelle, will you follow me a little more quietly now?

"Yes, Lord. But just one thing. I can't smile at my family, my children, and my grandchildren." Tears flowed freely at the thought.

Then smile at me, he added gently. I always see your smile, and I think it's beautiful.

Sometimes, when God speaks, he gives us nothing we ask for and everything we need. Just days before leaving on a business trip, my speech returned. About eight weeks later, a tingling sensation began in the corner of my mouth, then gradually liberated the rest of my face in the weeks that followed. Today, a mild paralysis remains as it did from my earlier bout as a teenager.

I'm grateful now for funny things, for the way one side of my mouth curves slightly downward when I'm tired. It tells me I need to rest. And for my one stationery eyebrow. Raising only one looks exotic. These things remind me that when God speaks, it's always best to listen. When he directs, it's best to obey. When he corrects, don't hesitate to change. And when he tells you something wonderful, it's a good idea to believe him.

*Virelle Kidder, an author and conference speaker, lives with her husband in New York. This article first appeared in the January/February 2003 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





## Reflect

- *Refer back to Matthew 4:4. Do you depend upon the Word of God every day for sustenance? How does that affect you and those around you?*
- *The author shared that she "decided to stay put" until she heard God speak, though she "wasn't sure how, or when, or through whom." What might you have to do in order to hear God speak?*
- *"Sometimes, when God speaks, he gives us nothing we ask for and everything we need," the author writes. How has this been true for you?*



## Surviving a Spiritual Dry Spell



We all go through times when God seems far away. Here's how women like you jumpstart a sputtering spiritual life.

**J**ust weeks after being on a spiritual high, I felt depressed and in need of a sign of God's presence in my life. But as I began reading my journal, I found examples of other times God had revealed his presence in my life when I'd been discouraged. Thumbing through my journal entries helps me remember how many times God has shown me his love.

*—Sharron McDonald, Arkansas*



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During a time of pain and spiritual frustration, my pastor reminded me that I didn't have to sit around doing nothing while I waited for God to answer my prayers. I could still find joy by serving others. So I called the church to find out where I could help, and started volunteering with the children's church. While it stretched my comfort zone, God met me there. By actively serving instead of passively waiting, I soon discovered I was out of my "desert," and filled with spiritual excitement!

*—Sondra Salazar, California*

To get back on track, I post encouraging Scriptures on my mirror. Then I spend some time alone writing God a letter, telling him why I'm distant and dry. I also meditate on his goodness, or call a friend to talk about what's happening in my spiritual life.

*—Carmen Mancinelli, Pennsylvania*

When I talk to a friend who hasn't experienced God's love and forgiveness, I'm reminded of all I have in Christ. It brings me back to God and his Word, because I need to rely on him when I share my faith. Most of all, it's exciting to see what God can do through my actions.

*—Dawn C. Pitsch, Washington*





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I always assumed the older I was and the longer I was a Christian, the closer to God I'd feel. I never imagined there would be times when I'd feel as if God didn't care about me—but there are. Yet, I've come to recognize certain truths exist whether I feel their reality or not. First, God loves me and is with me every step of the way. Second, God desires to use the good and the difficult to fashion me into his image. Third, God uses other people to remind me of his faithfulness. Finally, it's helpful to have a few Christian women who understand me, pray with me, and encourage me. When I take God at his Word—regardless of my circumstances—I rediscover an intimacy with him I would miss if I relied solely on what I see and feel.

*—Patty Stump, Arizona*

God seemed distant to me after my third child was born. I had a newborn baby, a 17 month old, and a toddler. On top of this, my husband's job was stressful, and he couldn't take time off to help after our daughter came home from the hospital. I felt completely alone. During those times, I placed a Bible where I could see it during the day to serve as a visible reminder of God's promise to never leave or forsake me. Just having it near brought me comfort. Soon I began recalling verses I'd read prior to my dry spell, and I eventually began praying again. My attitude softened as I realized what a privilege it is to call on God with my every need. I'm thankful he's there to walk with me through the joys of life—as well as the struggles.

*—Kristen Szweda, Wisconsin*





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### Surviving a Spiritual Dry Spell

I shake a spiritual dry spell by immersing myself in the Psalms. Then I listen to praise and worship CDs. I crank one up when I'm in the shower and sing along, thanking God for his gifts. Above all, I pray, telling God I need his help to get out of this slump. After all, he's the only One who has the cure!

*—Teresa Wells, Texas*

Just as school children begin their day with the Pledge of Allegiance, I decided to do the same. I wrote my own pledge of allegiance to God, and I now say it daily. After searching the Bible for verses to use in my "pledge," I began emerging from a season of doubt with a new sense of God's presence.

*—Lynn Lind, New Mexico*

*This article first appeared in the July/August 2001 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN.*

## Reflect

- *Which of these survival techniques stood out to you the most? Why?*
- *What would you contribute to this list for those who struggle through spiritually dry times?*





## Additional Resources



**God Is Closer Than You Think** by John Ortberg (Zondervan Corp., 2008; 208 pages). This book will enable you to realize God's presence in your life and enter into a more fulfilling relationship with Him.

**In the Meantime: The Practice of Proactive Waiting** by Rob Brendle (Random House, Inc., 2006; 224 pages). This book will help you find your way to whatever God has for you in life. Drawing parallels from the life of David, Brendle will show you how to "live into" your calling.

**Patience: The Benefits of Waiting** by Stephen Eyre (Zondervan Corp., 2001; 64 pages). This fruit of the Spirit Bible study helps you discover the benefits of waiting. Includes six Bible study lessons.





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### Additional Resources

**Waiting: Finding Hope When God is Silent** by Ben Patterson (Inter-Varsity Press, 1991). Successful waiting requires humility and hope. This book shows you how humility teaches us we exist for God's sake, not for our own; and how hope assures us that there is something worth waiting for.

**Waiting on God** by Andrew Murray (Christian Literature Crusade, 1999). Written out of the conviction that God's people need to learn, in practice and experience, the art of waiting only on God.

**What Is God Waiting For?: Understanding Divine Delays in Your Life** by Marlinda Ireland (Gospel Light, 2006; 224 pages). This book encourages readers to look to God and his word for direction in times of waiting.

**When God Takes Too Long: Learning to Thrive During Life's Delays** by Joseph Bentz (Beacon Hill Press, 2005; 144 pages). Examines the mysteries of God's timing and shows how you can thrive in the midst of one of life's greatest frustrations...waiting.



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