



GOD'S

GENTLE

WHISPER

Denise George





GOD'S GENTLE WHISPER

DEVELOPING A RESPONSIVE HEART TO GOD

A LONGING HEART HEARS



DENISE GEORGE

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS



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Dedication

For
my special friends who have inspired
and encouraged me in so many ways:
Dr. Warren Wiersbe and Mrs. Betty Wiersbe

The LORD said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.'

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a *gentle whisper*. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

(1 Kings 19:11-13)

Before you begin reading *God's Gentle Whisper*, please take a few minutes, find a comfortable quiet place, and read the fascinating story of the prophet Elijah, found in 1 Kings 17, 18, and 19.

My heartfelt thank you to all those wonderful people who made this book possible, Willie MacKenzie, Editorial Manager and his colleague Annella MacDonald.



As a Christian woman, I believe our life's goal is to know God, to love God, and to serve God.

We come to know God, to love God, and to serve God through prayer.

But prayer is not only speaking our words to Him.

Prayer is also finding a quiet place, and with the ears of seeking hearts, waiting and listening for God's gentle whisper to us.

For when we learn to listen with the ears of our hearts, we come to know God.

When we hear His gentle whisper, we come to love God.

And when to His whisper our listening hearts respond, we prepare to serve God.

May God richly bless you as you journey through the pages of this book.

Denise George





SECTION I
THE WAITING HEART







ONE



STANDING ON THE MOUNTAIN:

THE SECRET PLACE



While my young son plays quietly in the next room, I sit beside my grandmother's bed and hold her trembling hand. Beneath the layers of handmade quilts, I see the frail woman I call 'Mama,' the woman I have loved dearly for more than three decades.

Alice Crane Williams, my beloved grandmother – Mama – is dying. I cannot imagine life without her.

She is a simple woman who has suffered a lifetime of sickness and surgery. In her 80 years, she has never written a check, never driven a car, and never worked outside her home.

She would not rate very high on the world's yardstick of accomplishment. Yet, I know few women who have accomplished more. She has lived a long life in step with her Lord, empowered by the Holy Spirit, devoted to discipleship. Her spiritual impact on others has been profound. As my spiritual mother, she has left an indelible fingerprint of love and grace and beauty on my life.



A Welcome Haven

A storm brews outside her home, the white gabled house I have known since my birth. Dark clouds appear and are followed by bouts of thunder and lightning. The winds begins snapping off young trees at their roots and tossing them into the yard.

I expect to hear my son scream out with fear as I glance out the window into nature's unexpected chaos. Yet, however frightening the scene beyond these walls, inside we feel safe, secure, unafraid, and very much loved. The house is a welcome haven from the turmoil all around us.

Mama and I are not alone in the room where I so often slept as a child. For within me is nestled one still in development, one who will carry on my grandmother's name. My unborn daughter, Alyce, remains peaceful in her secret place beneath my heart. It is as if she somehow senses the preciousness of this moment for Mama and me, our moment of timelessness, our moment of unspoken prayer together in our own secret place.

Will Mama live to look upon the face of her new great-granddaughter, her only namesake? I wonder as greater darkness and the threat of more severe storms shadow the room.

I already seem to know the answer.

No, she won't. Mama will close her eyes and cease her breathing just ten days before Alyce will open her eyes and take her first breath of life.

This is our last meeting on this earth. Our final face-to-face farewell. And with the birth of my daughter so close at hand, I won't be able to travel the long distance to her funeral. We both sense we will meet again only in the promised life hereafter. What does one say or do or think at the 'final meeting'? I have never known a time without my grandmother. Her loving arms welcomed me into this world, surrounded me as a child, and nurtured me to adulthood. I cannot imagine life without her tender, wise counsel.



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So many times I have made the 300-mile trek to sit by my grandmother's side. Like little girls at a slumber party, we have talked and giggled and dreamed about the future. And how the minutes flew! We looked at our watches as if staring hard enough at them would make time show down. But, alas, each time, the sun rose, I rolled up my sleeping bag, packed my pajamas, said my thank-yous and goodbyes, and returned to my busy world far away from Mama's world.

Mama and I have loved our many times of nonstop conversation. But today, in Mama's short meantime between physical life and physical death, in this time of remembering and quiet waiting, we do not speak. We need no words. And in this secret place, our paradise away from the thundering world outside, we sense the presence of Another who remembers quietly and waits in this precious moment with us.

*



There are times in our lives so deep, so precious, so mysterious, so near to the core of our hearts, that words only hinder our communion. Thus it is with prayer. Our hearts can be so full of love or pain or gratitude or fear that our very silence overflows with meaning beyond the limited capability of words. We express ourselves instead with the prayer that pours forth from a touched heart, a heart so sensitive to its own beat that words would be stumbling.

'The fewer words the better prayer,' said reformer Martin Luther.

On this night, this storm-raged night when death glares at us from down the hall, I would agree with Dr. Luther. Words need be sparse. Our clasped hands, smiling eyes, and grateful memories of a life lived side by side, say more than we ever could with verbal words. In fact, words would make a clumsy stab at what our hearts so eloquently express.



GOD'S GENTLE WHISPER

God's Whisper

'But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret....' (Matt. 6:6 KJV.)

'Thy Father which is in secret....' Mama has spent much time in closet-prayer secreted with the Father. In fact, her entire life has been a prayer. More than anyone else, Mama has taught me the value and beauty of a secret place and a prayer of waiting and listening to the still, small voice that whispers within the prayer-closet walls.

One of my favorite authors, C. S. Lewis, believed that 'God whispers to us in our pleasures, ... but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone,' he writes, 'to rouse a deaf world.'¹

Dare I disagree with C. S. Lewis?

I would reverse the order. For I believe it is in our times of pleasure that God must shout and rouse our deaf ears. Pleasure so often dulls our sense of need for God. Truly, it is in our pain that He need only whisper. For in our pain the deaf ears of our hearts are unstopped, waiting, listening, hanging onto the comfort of His every word. Pain, the Great Teacher, can break our hearts and cause us to contemplate deeply humankind's most pondered question: 'Why, Lord, why?' There is but one Theologian who knows the answer. Thus, to Him, we turn our hearts and yearn for deeper understanding into the great mystery of life.



Waiting. Watching. Listening. There are many wonderful and beautiful ways to pray, to communicate with the Father. But it is the prayer that waits and watches, the prayer that perks the ears of our hearts to strain and to listen expectantly for God's gentle whisper that compels me to record it. For this

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem with Pain* (London, England: Fontana, 1940), p. 93.



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waiting, this 'standing under, in active strength, enduring till the answer comes,'² describes prayer at its richest.

I have discovered an abundant love for this type of prayer, the prayer of the waiting heart. Perhaps you, too, have discovered its surprising beauty and lasting afterglow.



I used to think of waiting as a passive activity. I have felt time wasting as I've stood in long, grocery check-out lines, bank lines, cafeteria lines, and post office lines. I loathe that kind of waiting where I must persist staring into space with an empty mind wandering. But waiting in prayer is nothing like waiting in line. It is far from a passive activity.

When God's great and beloved prophet, Elijah, waited for God on the side of the mountain, he did not passively sit or lie or lounge in his waiting. He had no blank stare and wandering empty mind. Elijah stood on the mountain, actively waiting, his eyes alert and watchful, his ears perked and eager to detect even the hint of God's voice. Longing, straining, yearning to hear from God.

Over the past years, Elijah has taught me much about how to pray this way. Elijah and Mama.

Mama's Secret Place

Oh, that I could know God as Elijah and Mama knew him!

On a cool spring morning, long before the pet rooster summoned us to rise, I looked from the kitchen window, beyond the tall old hickory nut trees, to the gardens that bloomed in bounty each year. Mama's flower gardens. Mama's secret place to meet the Lord.

I am sure her gardens brought more than one passerby to prayer. So lovely they lined the small farm's edge. People often

2. Oswald Chambers, *If You Will Ask* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1958), p. 36.



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stopped and admired them for a few rare moments of hushed beauty. And there in the midst of dew-laden blooms, Mama slowly walked. At times she lingered, her lips moving in silent prayer. Most times, however, her lips were still. She touched a treasured rose, and then with eyes moist from an overflowing and grateful heart, she simply looked towards the heavens and smiled.

Mama needed no words to commune with her Father. For they had walked through the gardens many times together, for many years, their hearts beating as one in perfect peace, tranquility and communion.



My friend, do you have a secret place, a place where you go alone to wait and watch and listen for the Lord? A place where you go faithfully to know your Father more intimately?

God is a God who wants to be known.³ We wait, we watch, we listen, and God rewards our seeking with knowledge of Himself.⁴ Dr. J. I. Packer, in his book *Knowing God* writes that the greatest gift God gives us is the gift of knowing Him.⁵ Imagine! We can actually know the one who created us in our 'secret place,' the one who knew us in our mother's womb long before we drew our first breath of air and opened our eyes to His glorious creation.



I have had many secret places over the years, places where I have spent quiet precious moments with the Lord. Some places were lovely to the eye and peaceful to the heart.

I remember the little private spot hidden by trees on a remote tall mountain in Rüschtikon, Switzerland, the 'village of roses.' It became my secret place of worship for almost a year while my family and I lived and worked in Switzerland.

3. Hebrews 1:1-2.

4. Hebrews 11:6.

5. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), pp. 14-15.



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I often stood on the side of the mountain in the pine straw nest powered with fresh snow, and tried to absorb the incomprehensible beauty. The emerald and shimmering gold Lake Zurich laid directly below me, the forests of snow-laden evergreens surrounded me, and the mighty Alps rose in distant peaks beyond me. It seemed right out of a storybook. I often blinked my eyes to believe the exquisite scenery before me.

On this, my own Elijah's mountain, I stood silently, my mouth agape in awe of the Creator's masterpiece. I believed no place in the world could be more breathtakingly beautiful.

Waiting? Yes.

Watching? Definitely.

Listening? With all the strength I could summon.

There, I waited in my own secret place, with expectation and a seeking heart, waiting for the Lord to pass by.

An Inner City Secret Place

In sharp contrast to Rüschtikon, with its rose petal fragrance lingering in the air, was another of my many secret places: Chelsea, Massachusetts, a dirty, violent, inner city located on the outskirts of Boston, Massachusetts.

It was a far cry from Rüschtikon with its Sleeping Beauty/ Cinderella setting. In storybook language, Chelsea would be more like Alice in Wonderland with its dangerous pathways, unpredictable curves, and its strange assortment of malevolent characters hiding behind every wall. A storm of violence, pain, and suffering rained heavily on the 30,000 Chelsea residents of all colors, ages, and backgrounds, who lived crowded into two square miles of dirty drab city concrete. We did not choose Chelsea. We are drawn to and inspired by mountains and trees and sparkling lakes – quiet, beauty, and serenity. Chelsea was chosen for us by the mission board of our denomination. Chelsea was indeed a mission field. It proved a seven-year missionary experience I will never forget.



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Chelsea had no sweet rose fragrance. Its only beauty lived in the innocent and loving faces of those too young to yet be aware of its filth and poverty.

There was the unwed mother with eleven children living in the one-room attic of a four-story apartment building.

There were the alcoholics who lived in the drainage ditches with no food, no friends, no heat, no medical care, and no hope.

There were gangs of teens drinking, drugging, and drifting through the late night streets with no direction, no guidance, no caring families, and no future outside prison walls.

And there were the children – the innocent ones of the concrete city. Children like David, who was placed in an abusive foster home as a baby. David coped with life as no child should ever have to. We tried to adopt David, the five-year-old boy who had never seen a real flower push its way through soil. But we were unsuccessful. We, too, as students, had little in this world – besides love – that we could offer David. I often wonder where he is now, the dark-skinned boy – now a middle-aged man – with bruises on his back and a little round face that seldom smiled.

In Rüslikon my heart was filled with prayers of thanksgiving for the beauty that surrounded and inspired me. I needed few words to express the gratitude of my heart.

In Chelsea, however, my heart was filled with prayers for others, the crowds of aimless people who tired to survive hard days surrounded by drugs, guns, prostitution, and desolation. I needed few words to express the pain in my heart for the poverty and suffering that surrounded me. Intercessory prayer from my heart repeatedly asked the 'whys' of faith, the hard questions – questions for which I waited and watched and strained to hear the answers.

In Chelsea, my secret place was a ladder-back chair at an enamel-painted table before a window that looked out on filth and vulgar depravity. But however unsettling the view, I found I was drawn



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much more to wait in prayer at that kitchen table than on that mountain in Rüschtikon, so great was my need to listen for God's voice in the midst of such fear, destitution, and suffering.

God needed no megaphone to rouse my deaf ears. I lived in Chelsea for only a few miserable years. But these people – who ventured rarely into the outside world – would live there forever. In the pain and pity I felt for them, I listened attentively, carefully for His comforting whisper and the answers I needed to hear and to share.

Back Into the Storm

It is time for me to leave my grandmother's quiet bedroom. For the last time, I lean over and lightly kiss her forehead. I would speak one last time to Mama by phone, but I would never see her again on this earth.

'I'll see you *later*, Mama,' are the only words I speak. We look into each other's eyes and we smile. We both know what *later* means. I stand and back slowly out of the room, taking one last mental snapshot to hold in memory throughout my life without her. Through intense physical pain, she keeps the smile on her lips until the loving embrace of our eyes is broken by distance.

As I leave our secret place, I am once again aware of the storm outside. I lift my small son from his playpen, and together we brace the wind and rain and leave the house that will never be the same to me again.



Every heart must have its hush. I am convinced that the waiting prayer is the most difficult to pray. In our lives, it is often much easier *to do* than it is *to be*, to pray with words and song and joyful dance than to wait and listen in sacred solitude. Yet the Lord summons us to go out and stand on our mountaintop, to 'be still, and know that I am God.'⁶

⁶ Psalm 46:10.



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My friend, our hearts are forever searching for a quiet place of solitude, a secret place where we alone can prepare ourselves for an encounter with the living Lord. Find your place. Perk your ears. Frequent often your secret place of solitude and prayer.

Questions for Group Study

1. Have you personally known the richness of a spiritual nurturer in your life? If so, describe that person.
 - a. What qualities made her/him different from others you loved and respected?
 - b. What traits did she/he possess that spoke to you in spiritually-inspiring ways?
 - c. How did that person bring you closer to the Lord?
 - d. What is the one most important spiritual lesson you learned from your nurturer?
2. What does this sentence mean to you: 'Our hearts can be so full of love or pain or gratitude or fear that our very silence overflows with meaning beyond the limited capability of words?'
 - a. Have you ever prayed so deeply from your heart that words only got in your way? Describe the event. What was your life situation when you prayed that particular prayer?
3. Do you agree with Martin Luther: 'The fewer words the better prayer'? If so, please explain why.
4. What does Scripture teach when it states: 'But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret....'?'
 - a. Why is it important that we have a secret place to pray, a private prayer-closet?
 - b. What is the significance of the statement: 'When thou hast shut thy door....'?

7. Matthew 6:6 (KJV).



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- c. Do you have a secret place of prayer where you and the Father can regularly meet? If so, please describe it.
 - d. Why do you think a secret place is important to your life of prayer?
5. Do you agree that: 'It is in our times of pleasure that God must shout and rouse our deaf ears,' and that 'It is in our pain that He need only whisper'? If so, why? If not, why?
6. Oswald Chambers describes 'waiting' as 'standing under, in active strength, enduring till the answer comes.' Do you agree or disagree with his definition and why? What does 'waiting' mean to you?
7. Describe your most beautiful secret place. What qualities did it have, or does it now have, that move you most to prayer?
8. Do you agree that 'the waiting prayer' is the most difficult prayer to pray? If so, please explain why.
9. What are your five greatest strengths and your five greatest weaknesses in your pursuit of prayer? Consider listing them and discussing them with your group.

Suggestions for Personal Reflection

Choose a favorite place in your home or garden or office or city park.

- Decide to visit your secret place at least once a day, if not more often.
- Give yourself time to sit quietly and to relax your body and mind.
- Read favorite selections from Scripture to help you focus more fully on the Lord.
- Pour out your heart to God. Keep nothing from Him.
- Then, listen. Listen as He speaks to the depths of your heart.



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- Please don't rush your prayer-closet time, for it takes time to settle down and to concentrate on God, His love, His goodness. It takes time to prepare our hearts to hear His whisper.
- Schedule a time when you will be uninterrupted. Think only about God and His presence. Try to keep your thoughts free from distractions. Concentrate on meeting the Lord and listening to His words to you.

