

*Awaken Your Senses:
Exercises for Exploring
the Wonder of God*

December 2011

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Awakening to authentic spiritual experiences with God

Awakening your senses to the wonder of God is what poet Caroline C. Graveson called becoming aware of the “daily round for beauty.” She believed that God was in all beauty—natural and human-made. When things are “right”—be they serious or silly, humble or great—there is a fitness or correctness about them. They are pleasing to the eye, ear, nose, tongue, fingers and soul. Thus, a nursery rhyme can move us as deeply as a requiem by Mozart because God is in all beauty, both the simply amazing and the amazingly simple.

We each desire authentic spiritual experiences with God: real, moving, transforming engagements. The trouble is that’s not how we have been taught to live our faith. Most of our teaching comes by way of sermons, books, Bible studies and other spiritual resources that instruct our thinking. Often, though, these resources miss our souls, the prime place of divine encounter. The book you are holding takes a different tack. Its purpose, simply put, is to *help more of you experience more of God*. How will we accomplish that? We’re going to introduce you to spiritual practices that engage your whole person: both sides of your brain, all five senses and your body. In this way, you’ll learn how to cultivate an experiential faith—one that trains you to be attentive to a self-disclosing God who reveals himself in each daily round of beauty.

We need both sides of our brain in order to live and grow as a person of faith. In fact, neither side can do its job well without the other. Words provide content and information that are critical to faith formation, but words alone are not sufficient to create encounters with God that nurture wholeness. As Dr. Terry Wardle of Ashland Theological Seminary says, “We are over informed and under transformed.” Why? Because we rely almost exclusively on word-oriented approaches that provide information about God but rarely facilitate engagement with God. We need to awaken both sides of our brain in order to experience God.

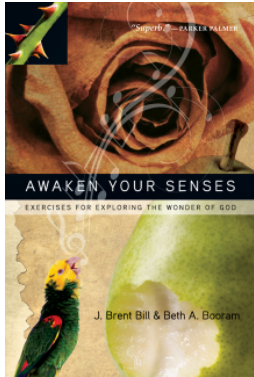
Since we live so much out of our thinking, we often become divorced from our souls and bodies. We lose a sense of place, of rootedness in life. Using our senses helps us live in present time. That’s important because the

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present is the only place we can experience God. We can't experience God while thinking of the past or planning the future. Neither exists right now. God can only be experienced in the reality of the present moment. When we attend to life with one or more of our senses, we immediately enter real time and awaken to the possibilities of God in it.

—Adapted from the introduction



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An inside look at *Awaken Your Senses*

Why did you write *Awaken Your Senses*?

J. Brent Bill and Beth A. Booram: As people of faith we often spend much of our spiritual lives in our heads and thoughts, and therefore miss the ways God is present in the very physical world in which we live and encounter others. We crave a deeper experience of God, but often content ourselves with spiritualized thinking rather than actual experience. As we (Beth and Brent) have grown in our faith, we have learned the exciting lesson that each of our senses is an amazing conduit through which we can live a mindful life and wake ourselves to the presence, mystery and wonder of God that exist in each daily round of beauty.

Describe the purpose of *Awaken Your Senses*.

Brent and Beth: *Awaken Your Senses* invites readers to engage the right and left brain, all five senses and their body in order to experience more of God in each moment of their day. It does so through providing stories, examples and stimulating exercises that teach readers how to live more fully present to God, themselves and the world.

What are the top two to five main things you want readers to take away from your book?

Brent and Beth:

- The wonder, beauty and mystery of God are embedded within the very fabric of our daily lives.
- We can experience that wonder, beauty and mystery only if we live in the present moment.
- We can become present to life through attending to one or more of our senses.
- Each sense can be a conduit through which we experience God and practice God's presence.

After reading *Awaken Your Senses*, we hope that the reader's desire to experience God will intensify and that he or she will know how to continue to encounter God by being present to God's ways revealed within the fabric of life.

BIO

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



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J. Brent Bill is a writer, retreat leader and Quaker minister. He's the author and coauthor of many books, including *Sacred Compass: The Way of Spiritual Discernment*, *Holy Silence: The Gift of Quaker Spirituality*, *Mind the Light: Learning to See with Spiritual Eyes*, *Holy Places: Matching Sacred Space with Mission and Message*, and *Imagination and Spirit: A Contemporary Quaker Reader*. In addition, he is the author of more than one hundred short stories and nonfiction articles. His writings and musings can also be found on his blog, *Holy Ordinary*.

Bill is a graduate of Wilmington College and the Earlham School of Religion. He has been a local church pastor, denominational executive, seminary faculty member and go-cart track operator.

Bill lives with his wife on Ploughshares Farm, fifty acres of Indiana farmland that is being reclaimed for native hardwood forests and warm season prairie grasses.



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Beth A. Booram has been involved in vocational ministry for more than twenty-five years. She spent sixteen years on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ. Since that time, she has served in several pastoral roles within the local church, including at a 6,500-member church, where she led a weekly women's ministry of more than 500 women.

Beth is married to Dave and has four incredible young-adult children. She resides in Fishers, Indiana.