

Listening for God, by Renita J. Weems

reviewed by [Susan Wesley Hartley](#) in the [September 8, 1999](#) issue

While most of us grit our teeth and slog through times of spiritual dryness hoping that nobody will notice, Renita Weems looks these times straight in the face. With passionate longing and searing honesty, she perseveres until she discovers a new language of God's presence. "Stalking epiphanies," Weems turns to journaling prayer to "grope, stammer, and sniff" her way to God. She finds that "every now and then, in between the muck and mire . . . an insight, a revelation, a wild and crazy grace, a glimpse of eternity inserts itself upon the pages of my journal that leaves me hushed. . . . Silence is not quickly mistaken for rejection anymore."

Weems's description of this process reminded me of Jacob wrestling with the angel, refusing to abandon the struggle until the angel blessed him. Weems grasps her spiritual "silent seasons" firmly and wrests blessing from them. She discovers that God's silence is ultimately God's new way of communication with her, and emerges with a deeper intimacy with God.

As Weems has embraced marriage and motherhood, it has grown harder and harder for her to retreat from the world in order to approach God. She challenges God to meet her "on the run" in the midst of her responsibilities and relationships. She strives "to discover how the interruptions of life, and nurturing and caring, can bring us into deeper encounters with God."

Part of her struggle and her blessing comes from the challenge of integrating divergent aspects of her life: the spiritualities of the Pentecostal, Methodist and Baptist traditions in which she has worshiped and ministered; her African-American heritage; traditional spiritual disciplines; and the rigors of biblical scholarship and of teaching on the faculty of Vanderbilt University Divinity School.

Weems's reflections on the markers on her spiritual journey are beautiful, poignant and often humorous. Her memories of the women and men who shared this journey are tender and enlightening. Each vignette is complete unto itself as well as part of the whole. This gives the reader time to pause and "stalk epiphanies" alongside her. Readers will find their own struggles of faith blessed by entering into Weems's experience.