



*Finding God in the Verbs:
Crafting a Fresh Language of
Prayer*

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“Finding God in the Verbs came along just in time. I am sick unto death of my own prayers, and suspect God too is tired of rolling his eyes at my words. Why am I so careful in my writing and so careless in my prayers? Bill and Isbell are renewing not only my prayers but my heart.”

—Leslie Leyland Fields,
author of *Forgiving Our Fathers
and Mothers*

God, according to sentence structure?

In their new book Finding God in the Verbs: Crafting a Fresh Language of Prayer, Jennie Isbell and J. Brent Bill present a new approach for finding deeper communion with God in the way we talk and communicate. Offering companionship and guidance, they urge us to notice our prayer experiences, working to deepen them through a change in language. Here they explain the importance of such a journey.

Your book examines the way we communicate with God and the impact it has on our spiritual relationship with him. Why does this need help and what do you recommend?

Jennie Isbell and Brent Bill: The most essential conversation we have—the conversation between ourselves and God—is often constrained by formality or lack of imagination. This book and the exercises therein are designed to break readers out of ruts and self-imposed limits on communicating authentically with God. A difficulty of contemporary living is the speed and volume of information we receive that overloads rationality and distracts from the simple, mystical communion with God that is available to those who tend their relationship with him. This book seeks to ground readers in simple, deep and authentic conversation with God that reflects the reader’s deepest held beliefs.

You write, “Our hearts told us that we had lapsed into easy God speak. We weren’t reaching deep into our spirits and drawing out living words of praise, confession, concern, intercession and longing. We were tired of speaking in clipped shorthand to God. We wanted to pray in such a way that we showed up with our whole selves.” That makes it sound like everyone struggles with their prayer language. Can you explain?

Jennie and Brent: Three classic questions of theology examine a thing by asking what it implies about God, about humanity and about the relationship between God and human nature. By applying this easily accessible theological tool to one’s own prayers, the prayers of one’s community, and the prayers of tradition, a person is able to bring to the surface her own deeply held beliefs, and to bring into alignment the God one preaches with the God one prays to. Though informed by our lifelong relationships with Christianity, this is not a book about doctrine. It is a book of instruction and encouragement for tending the relationship between the reader and God, and like any other relationship that involves a human being, there is a tendency to summarize, shortcut, abbreviate and come to see through “lenses” of assumption and habit, which eventually deaden a relationship.

If you could distill *Finding God in the Verbs* into several takeaways, what would they be?

Jennie and Brent:

- Prayer is not just for professionals or dead saints. It is as alive as we are and will be as lively as we desire to make it!
- True prayer of the heart can be spontaneous or crafted.

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“Many of us live with a severely disordered view of God. Finding God in the Verbs is a genuinely practical and fun help. With an inviting conversational tone, Jennie and Brent reveal how language shapes and guides our prayers and ultimately unlocks our hearts into a deeper, more intimate relationship of joy and ease with God.”

— **Nathan Foster**, Spring Arbor University, author of *Wisdom Chaser* and *The Making of an Ordinary Saint*

- Words have power in the minds and hearts of humans, so examining our words before and after we use them can ensure that we are conveying the truest truth we know about God, ourselves and the relationship between God and humanity.
- Prayer is a way of communicating that can be learned and improved with practice.
- God is in relationship with each of us, and given the inequity of power, knowledge and general godliness, it is an arrogant waste of time to try to hide the truth of who we are and what we feel from God. Therefore, prayer should be absolutely authentic.



Jennie Isbell (M.Div., Earlham School of Religion) is an experienced spiritual director. In addition to her training in spiritual care, Jennie cares deeply about the intersection of the spirit and the body, working extensively as a practitioner and teacher in yoga, Integrative Yoga Therapy, Reiki, Thai bodywork and massage. She is the author of *Leading Quakers*, an eight-part curriculum for training worship communities. She lives in Greenfield, Massachusetts, with her husband.



Brent Bill is a writer, retreat leader and Quaker minister. He's the author and coauthor of many books, including *Awaken Your Senses*, *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, nonfiction articles and the popular 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. He 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.