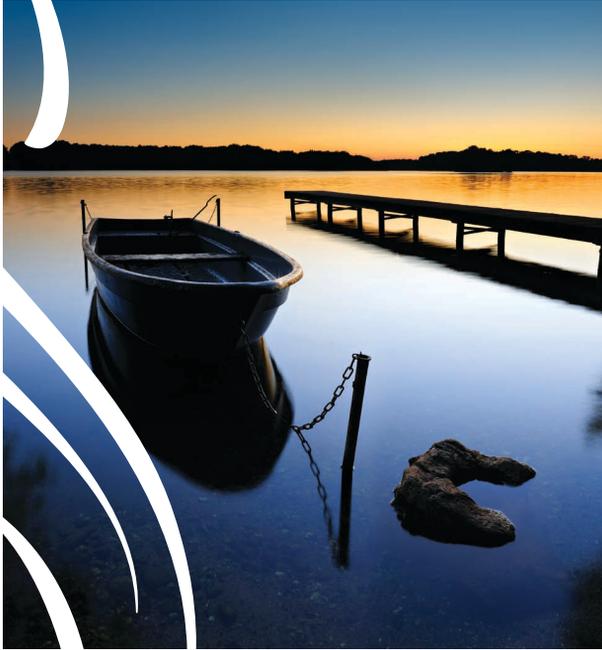


MARGARET SILF



LANDSCAPES OF
Prayer



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*For Gerry and Brian, cherished soul-friends,
guides, and fellow travellers*





THE POWER OF *Landscape*

Our photo albums bulge with memories of landscapes we have loved. Just to browse these memories evokes whole stories about ourselves and our lives and our world.

Of course we can engage with landscape superficially, just by pulling over into the parking area, viewing the distant scene and then moving on, almost untouched by what we have encountered. Or we can become part of a landscape and allow it to become part of us. We can let it penetrate us with something of its spirit, and from then on we will carry that spirit with us wherever we go, however far we may become separated from the beloved land. This happens, for example, when we have inhabited or frequented certain places for a long time, and they have taken root in our souls and left an indelible imprint there. We may discover, perhaps when we have to leave them, that we love them with a power we cannot put into words.

Prayer has its own kind of landscapes, and in our spiritual life too we may engage merely superficially with the mystery that holds us in being, or

we may go deeper until we feel we are inhabiting the mystery, as we might inhabit a much-loved land, and the mystery is inhabiting us. The deeper we venture, the more powerfully the mystery we call God will shape us and mould us, and we may discover that we love and long to relate to the mystery in ways that ultimately only silence can express.

This book invites you to wander at will through some of the landscapes of your soul, noticing those that touch your heart in a special way at any particular time, and lingering there for as long as you will, to explore what that soul-space means for you. Different spiritual landscapes will speak to you at different times of your life and in different situations. So take time, wherever you find yourself, to be fully present to that space in your heart, so that you might hear more clearly the message that it holds for you.

And as you wander and linger, may you discover ever-deeper layers of the story God is weaving in your life and in our world.



“The best fertilizer is the gardener’s shadow.”

Author unknown

*G*ARDEN



What, I wonder, does a garden mean for you? Summer days enjoying the scent of new-mown grass and the fragrance of the flowers? Birdsong? Vegetables and herbs that travel only the distance between your kitchen garden and your table? Or maybe hard work, an aching back, an invincible army of weeds?

Would it surprise you to discover that God is in all of these aspects of your heart's garden, and that prayer is to be found in the labour as well as in the love, in the heart's aching as well as in the heart's desire?

The word "paradise", in its ancient Persian, Hebrew, and Greek forms, originally meant "a sacred enclosure". It's easy to see how this idea became the "walled garden" – an evocative image of what prayer can be. I have memories of many beautiful walled gardens, often at the heart of deeply prayerful retreat houses or ancient castles or monasteries, but for today let me introduce you to the smallest ever "walled garden". The story goes that once there was a kindly noble lady who lived in a magnificent mansion. She often used to entertain guests, and one day, as she and a friend were taking tea together, the teapot slipped out of her hand as she was serving her guest. The fine china teapot fell to the ground and its spout and handle broke off. Most people would have thrown it out, I guess, but she loved the teapot, and she gave it a new form of life instead. She made it into a tiny garden. She planted delicate flowers in it, and in time it became its own miniature "sacred enclosure". It reminded her and her guests, every day, that in our brokenness we can be even more lovingly tended and cherished than when we were whole.

Your heart is a garden, the place you go to meet God in prayer, and the place where God meets you, to help you tend the sacredness you share. There will be weeds there, for sure, and maybe brambles and thorns. No human heart is without these. Sometimes, perhaps, it will be good to uproot them, so that they don't spread

