

A person is running through a large, multi-tiered water fountain. The water is spraying upwards and outwards, creating a misty atmosphere. The person is in silhouette, running towards the center of the fountain. The ground is made of wooden planks, and the overall scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

MARGARET SILF

# COMPASS

---

MEETING GOD EVERY DAY AT EVERY TURN

---

# POINTS

# INTRODUCTION

---

**G**OD HAS ESCAPED FROM THE SANCTUARY.

Is that bad news or good news? For some people it might be a terrifying thought, because if God isn't confined to our holy places, how will we know where to find God? Will we ever be able to find God at all? For others it is a liberating thought, because if God gets loose, then God is potentially to be found *everywhere*, including, of course, the sanctuary.

God is in all things—this is a well-known observation. It's the kind of thing we say without really knowing what we mean. It's the kind of thing we wish we could really believe. If God is indeed in all things, then why does God often seem to be so elusive? Why do we so often have to ask, "Where is God in all of this?"

*Compass Points* is written out of the conviction that God isn't as elusive as we think, and certainly isn't stuck in a holy box that we visit only on Sundays. Like the light shining through the image on the cover, the God who runs through *Compass Points* is likely to turn up

just about anywhere—on a boardwalk, in the movement of water, in the energy and curiosity of a child, and in the sparkling presence that flickers through a fountain. God is in the big story of our human journey on planet earth, in our origins and in our destiny and in every moment in between. And God is in all the smaller but equally amazing stories of how our individual lives move on, step by step and day by day. God is in the light and in the shadows of our experience, in what we rejoice in and in what we grieve over. God is both the dream we follow and the inspiration for our quest. God is in every choice we make, always urging us, prompting us, and coaxing us to choose life. When our lives fall apart, God is right there, waiting and longing to lead us beyond breakdown to breakthrough.

The first time I held Alexa Storm, to whom this book is dedicated, she was only a few minutes old. I felt closer to her than to my own next breath, and yet I knew I was also gazing upon a new human life packed with mystery. The same paradox is present in our sense of the divine. God is in the everyday details of everything we are and do, feel and think, and yet God remains and will

always remain utterly mysterious. And, like Alexa, God evokes a personal response from us. A child calls forth our deepest desire to nurture and guide and love. God calls forth our deepest desire, not just to strive to know God better, but to seek to love each other with the kind of love God reveals.

As we journey we will travel through all the points of the compass, reminding ourselves that God is waiting to meet us in every possible direction. Yet in all our journeying what matters most is not where we are *going*, but how we are *being*, here and now in this present moment. God is *ever-present*—not, as we may have grown up believing, either *ever-past* or *ever-future*. The *ever-present* is a dynamic reality that can't be boxed in or defined, but can only be experienced. *Compass Points* pauses in every direction, catches snapshots of God's footprints, and invites you simply to "look *here*," wherever you happen to be and however you are feeling.

The reflections in this book are very personal and are gathered from my own daily journeying. *Your* encounters with the living God are your own. They will be different. They will be unique. Don't follow

my footprints, but make your own. And maybe share them too, with trusted friends, because God encounters multiply when they are shared, like seeds falling on fertile ground. My only desire in sharing some glimpses of my daily journeying is to encourage you to seek God in your own, and perhaps to help you recognize and respond to the divine present-ness wherever you meet it.

Readers who are familiar with the spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola will readily recognize the debt this book and its author owe to the Ignatian tradition. The journey round the compass points reflects the most important themes of the Spiritual Exercises. However, this dynamic is not confined to any one approach to the spiritual journey. It is powerful precisely because it reflects the dynamic of most people's search for God, whatever their spiritual background. *Compass Points* is a brief excursion to show how reflective prayer on our daily experience might look in practice. Keep in mind, however, that there are as many ways of praying as there are people trying to pray. Let your own ways suggest themselves, and trust them to lead you into your unique pathways with God.

Thank you for joining me in this adventure of awareness that doesn't ask you to make long journeys, read erudite books, or attend expensive programs, but simply to be present to the life you are actually living, and to discover for yourself the myriad ways in which the light of God shines through your minutes and your days.

MARGARET SILF

NANTWICH, ENGLAND, AUGUST 2008

## NORTHEAST

---

# *Finding God in All Things*

**I**N A STORY BY ANTHONY DE MELLO, A FISH IS searching for the ocean. Everyone he asks has heard of this thing called “ocean,” but no one has any idea of what it looks like, or where it might be found. Maybe it is just a figment of fish imagination. Maybe it is just wishful thinking. Or maybe it is the ultimate reality in which every fish lives and moves and has its being. Maybe it is the mystery that nourishes every fish and sea creature and keeps them alive and growing. Maybe it is the place in which every little stirring of the water, every hidden current guides the course of every fish, from the smallest plankton to the mighty whale. Maybe it is the one true home.

If you too are searching for this elusive ocean in which you live and move and have your being, then look no further than what is all around you. God is closer to

us than we are to ourselves, so close that we can't see the ocean for the water, the forest for the trees. God is closer to us than our own breathing, closer than our eyes can focus, less than a heartbeat away.

Where will we find this mysterious presence that is so close yet seems so far away? As we head northeast, we discover that God is, quite simply, everywhere, in all that happens and in every particle of all that is.

Enjoy your exploration every day. Read the sermons in the stones along your path. Listen to the song that daily life is singing in your heart. Find God around the next turn in the road, just waiting to surprise you.



## 24 | Evening Primrose

THE EVENING PRIMROSE NEVER FAILS TO AMAZE me. IN their season, the flowers open up about half an hour before sunset, and when they do it's like watching time-lapse photography, a nature documentary on fast-forward. The bud suddenly splits open and the petals unfurl in minutes, before your eyes.

But this flower has a short life. Twenty-four hours later it will be withering and dying. Just one day of life—one day that may be lived in glorious sunshine or in fog, rain, wind, or storm. Just one day, to give delight and to release its seed upon the earth.

It gives me courage to live my rather longer human life with that kind of trustful surrender. Some of us get a life in the sunshine of love, security, happiness, health, and success. Others struggle with sickness, poverty, failure, and disappointment and never get a glimpse of happiness. Yet every life matters and leaves a little seed.

We can't change the weather of our circumstances. We can only shape the seed that our lives pass on to those who come after us.

# Knowing, Understanding, Forgiving

|25

THE LAME MAN STANDS ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE revolving door, gathering up his small store of energy to tackle the challenge of getting into the building. As he is just about ready to do so, another man approaches the revolving door from the inside, swings himself through it, and brushes past the lame man waiting unsteadily outside.

Their shoulders touch, and the slight pressure causes the lame man to lose his balance and stumble, losing his hard-won position. He will have to begin the task all over again.

The other man seems not to notice the magnitude of what has just happened but walks on with just a murmured, "Sorry."

The lame man follows the other's departing tracks with a hurt and angry gaze, before beginning to gather himself again. Suppressed rage and frustration show clearly on his face.

He does not realize that the man who has brushed past him so carelessly is blind.

To know all is to understand all: to understand all is to forgive all.

I begin to see why Jesus warns us not to judge.

WHEN A ZEBRA FOAL IS BORN, SO THE RANGER informs me, it first staggers to its feet and runs in circles round its mother's legs. Nature's way, no doubt, of getting those spindly newborn limbs strong enough, quickly enough, to flee from predators.

But then, exhausted, the newborn foal collapses in a weary heap and lies back, simply gazing, for hours it seems, at its mother. *How very cute*, I think. But this isn't cuteness; it's something else altogether. This is the foal memorizing its mother's stripe pattern.

Imagine! Every single zebra on this planet has a unique stripe pattern. Memorizing its mother's pattern is the foal's first act of bonding, its first defense against getting lost in the herd.

I believe that God paints a unique pattern of presence in each human life. We discover this pattern as we reflect on what is actually happening in our everyday experience. It is there we will notice God's personal relationship with us, unfolding minute by minute.

This reflection becomes an attitude of mindfulness, an ongoing act of bonding, and it holds us in an unbreakable connection with the source of our being through every moment of our living.

## You can find God as easily at the car wash as you can at the cathedral.

---

FOR MANY CHRISTIANS, IT'S RELATIVELY EFFORTLESS TO EXPERIENCE GOD in special places, such as a church or a mountaintop; or at special times, such as the birth of a child or the wedding of two people deeply in love. But it can be quite a challenge for us to meet God in the most ordinary of places, in the most ordinary of times. God in the magnificent? No problem. God in the mundane? That's a bit harder.

In *Compass Points*, best-selling Ignatian spirituality author and beloved speaker Margaret Silf leads us to discover God beyond the grandiose and to find the Divine in our daily lives. Through short but powerful meditations and vignettes based on her own authentic spiritual experiences, Silf reveals the interior process of Ignatian mindfulness—of which a core tenet is that God can be found in *all* things.

By joining Silf on her journey through real life in the real world, readers will have their own eyes, minds, and hearts opened to the Divine experience and will come to more fully recognize God's active, abiding presence in everything that they see and do.

---

MARGARET SILF travels widely in her work as a retreat director and speaker on Ignatian spirituality. Her books include *Inner Compass*, *Close to the Heart*, and *Going on Retreat*. She lives in England.

**LOYOLA PRESS.**  
A JESUIT MINISTRY  
[www.loyolapress.com](http://www.loyolapress.com)  
Chicago

