

I have chosen two books to review. Both books have the word “windows” in their titles but that is where the similarity ends. One is fictional and the other is about experiencing God in new ways; one is set in the context of Afghanistan and the other in our North American world; one depicts the struggles encountered for justice and freedom and the other opens avenues for living the presence of God in our everyday lives. Ultimately, though, both books point to how our lives can be enriched if we are willing to cast our gaze and goals beyond ourselves.

Windows of the Soul by Ken Gire

“Ken Gire calls us to a fresh sensitivity to God’s voice speaking through the unexpected parables that surround us: a child’s need for significance...the misunderstood sadness of a van Gogh masterpiece...the eloquence of the sunlight dancing on water...”

Gire points to a world infused with the voice of the One who can transform our backyard shrubs into burning bushes lit by His presence. His voice penetrates the raw material of our daily lives, speaking through Scripture and prayer, a painting or poem, the remark of a friend or a night sky filled with stars.

Windows of the Soul will open your eyes to a fresh way of seeing, hearing and enjoying the presence of God in your life.” (from the book cover)

Although this book was written 20 years ago, I think it is a classic and very readable for our present time, as we question truth, reality and values. At the end of each section he writes a unique prayer.

In the first half, the author explores the ways in which the metaphor of the window can open our awareness of God’s activity in our everyday lives and how this can begin to address our soul’s deep longing for God’s real presence for us

The second half of the book explores those areas where God can speak gently or forcefully to us. Some of those areas are stories, art, dreams, writing, Scripture, tears and depression. He uses well told examples of his and others that come through with sincerity and integrity. I felt I was walking with him having a discussion rather than being told how to live my life.

Ken Gire immersed himself in theology and then, which was unusual in those days, followed a call from God to be a writer rather than a pastor. In his writing, he maintains a delicate balance between deep theological understanding and the importance of everyday awareness of our windows of opportunity.

“A Prayer for Grace

*Thank you, God,*

*For those moments in my life*

*when you opened a window*

*and offered a word*

*that nourished the hunger in my soul.*

*Give me the grace to realize*

*that these are the words I live by,  
not by bread alone,  
whatever form that bread may take  
however satisfying it may seem at the time.  
Give me the grace to live not just reflectively but receptively,  
that I may not only notice when a window is opened  
but also receive what is offered,  
understanding that what is offered  
Is my soul's daily bread..."*  
(page 59)

A House Without Windows by Nadia Hashimi

The author's parents left Afghanistan in the 1970's before the Soviet invasion. In 2002 she spent some time in the country of her parent's origin. She is presently a pediatrician and living in Washington, D.C. with her husband and four children.

This novel is about Zeba, a loyal wife and a loving mother of 4 who is living her days quietly in a small Afghan village. Her family's life is shattered when her husband, Kamil, is found brutally murdered in the courtyard of their home. She is suspected of the crime, refuses to tell what happened and is sent to Kabul's Chil Mahtab's women's prison. There, she befriends other women whose stories of injustice we hear. Zeba seems to have a power to help some of these women. Her lawyer, an Afghan-born, American-raised man discovers much about the culture of the justice system of the country as he works through the case.

It is a haunting but wonderful story of survival, sisterhood and a mother's love that illuminates the plight of women in a traditional culture of today. I found it a book hard to put down but difficult to comprehend the atrocities still thriving in our world. A House Without Windows is definitely a story of life without hope for justice for women in Afghanistan but love trumps injustice in this story.

*"The message, the rain, and the divine light come through my window  
Falling into my house from my origins  
Hell is that house without a window  
True religion, O servant of God, is creating a window  
Do not raise your ax to every nook, come  
Raise your ax to frame a window  
Do you not know that sunlight*

*Is only the image of the sun that appears beyond her veil?"*

*RUMI (from the introduction)*