

“Winn Collier has learned through the twists and turns of his own life the difference between faith and certainty. When life pushes us to the edge between belief and disbelief, some rush back to unquestioning faith and others rush away to unquestioning disbelief. This book helps us learn to stay in the place of tension that is true both to the realities of our experience and to the God who made and loves us.”

— DANIEL TAYLOR

author of *The Myth of Certainty* and *In Search of Sacred Places*

“By sharing his journey, Winn has put into words the struggle of engaging in the mysteries of knowing God. His conversational style causes the reader to enjoy the insights gained by his honest search for intimacy with our Creator. I would recommend this book to anyone seeking a thoughtful, heartfelt approach to knowing God.”

— KEN EDWARDS, MDiv, MA

counselor

“*Restless Faith* is an invitation to honesty. In a culture where we are constantly tempted to choose cosmetic image over raw truth, it is refreshing to hear someone speak so candidly about the real terrain on the path of faith. With the voice of a fellow traveler, Winn invites us to wrestle with the reality of our lives as we dance with the mystery of God.”

— DEBBIE SMITH, MA

executive director, Center for Women in Medicine

*restless faith*

*Holding On to a God Just  
Out of Reach*

WINN COLLIER



NAV PRESS®

BRINGING TRUTH TO LIFE

*If the book we are reading does not wake us, as with a fist hammering on our skull, why then do we read it? Good God, we would also be happy if we had no books, and such books as make us happy we could, if need be, write ourselves. But what we must have are those books which come upon us like ill-fortune, and distress us deeply, like the death of one we love better than ourselves, like suicide. A book must be an ice-axe to break the sea frozen inside us.*

—FRANZ KAFKA

## *contents*

Acknowledgments	9
Prologue: Confessions of a Pilgrim	11
Chapter 1: Savage Grace	23
Chapter 2: The Darker Side of Faith	37
Chapter 3: Stepping into the Story	53
Chapter 4: Risk of Doubt	75
Chapter 5: Twilight Knowing	91
Chapter 6: Sex and Sacrament	109
Chapter 7: The Deep Waters of Lament	125
Chapter 8: Whisper of Pleasure	141
Chapter 9: Between	157
Chapter 10: Of God and Fireflies	171
Reader's Guide	185
Notes	193
Author	205

## *acknowledgments*

The mystery of God both drew and frightened her.” This is how Mark Salzman described one of his nuns, Sister Helen, in *Lying Awake*. Salzman could have been describing me. In the process of giving myself space to explore God’s otherness in these pages, my emotions have kept pace with Sister Helen. I am enticed toward an experience with this God who is distinctly himself, who resists the small-minded descriptions I want to label him with and the shallow, empty corners I continually attempt to push him into. This God is alive, bold, and never boring.

Yet this God who pushes back in his resilient act of defiance is foreboding. I don’t know what to do with him. Rather than fitting into my scheme, he arranges it so that I have to yield to his. He makes me squirm. He makes me nervous. Sometimes he makes me frightened.

Because God eludes my tightly clenched grip, I question and struggle. I have doubts. These pages fumble around a good bit with my uncertainties, with my doubts, with the realities of a God who is beyond. Yet doubts can be a way of engagement, a way of staying in the conversation. God, it seems, likes us to keep talking. “Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith,” Buechner says. “They keep it awake and moving.” My faith, then, is vigorous indeed.

There are many to thank for this book. Lil Copan actually got it started when she encouraged a writer to write. Steve Parolini’s

CHAPTER 1

*savage grace*

*Our salute to you tumbles out:*

*Lord, sovereign, governor, king  
political images of us before you, gender specific,  
marked by macho.*

*Sometimes we speak the terms glibly, out of habit.  
Sometimes we speak them with gravity, counting  
on you.*


*But sometimes we are brought up short to see,  
yet again,*

*that you are not kidding: you are other than us.  
you will not be mocked.*

—WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

*“Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” the LORD says. “Yet I  
have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have  
turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his  
inheritance to the desert jackals.”*

—MALACHI 1:2-3

 Sometimes love takes on unlikely shapes and gives off strange aromas. It can surprise you and grab you in places you would