



## Help Thanks Wow: The Three Essential Prayers

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## **Help Thanks Wow: The Three Essential Prayers** Anne Lamott

New York Times-bestselling author Anne Lamott writes about the three simple prayers essential to coming through tough times, difficult days and the hardships of daily life.

Readers of all ages have followed and cherished Anne Lamott's funny and perceptive writing about her own faith through decades of trial and error. And in her new book, *Help, Thanks, Wow*, she has coalesced everything she knows about prayer to these fundamentals.

It is these three prayers – asking for assistance from a higher power, appreciating what we have that is good, and feeling awe at the world around us – that can get us through the day and can show us the way forward. In *Help, Thanks, Wow*, Lamott recounts how she came to these insights, explains what they mean to her and how they have helped, and explores how others have embraced these same ideas.

## **Help Thanks Wow: The Three Essential Prayers Details**

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## From Reader Review Help Thanks Wow: The Three Essential Prayers for online ebook

### Derek Emerson says

Anne Lamott definitely stretches the boundaries of Christian writing. For that, we can thank her. Yes, she swears, says honest and unkind things (usually about herself), sometimes refers to God as Phil, and even lets slip a longing for her earlier, non-Christian lifestyle.

In her most recent book, "Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers," Lamott takes her earthly approach to the most holy of acts, prayer. In this short work, she talks about each of the three prayers and ends with some thoughts on "Amen."

She notes at the outset that "Prayer is taking a chance that against all odds and past history, we are loved and chosen, and do not have to get it together before we show up." If other prayer books make you feel wholly inadequate to seek communion with God, Lamott will get you shouting at God without guilt. "God can handle honesty, and prayer begins as an honest conversation."

Of the three prayers, her section on "Help" is the strongest. Although a short book, this could even be shortened more as the multiple of examples for one type of prayer can become tiresome. And Lamott always has a tendency to want to show people how cool she is -- she tires too hard, since her unique approach to life is clear. But perhaps she has used "Help" more than other prayers, so her words hit the mark with assurance.

Calling it "the first great prayer," she says in praying for help we find "There's freedom in hitting bottom, in seeing that you won't be able to save or rescue your daughter, her spouse, his parents, or your career, relief in admitting you've reached the place of great unknowing."

The theme that runs clearly through all of Lamott's writing, is the power of grace. She does not get why God would forgive her, but she is forgiven, so she accepts it. But grace does not create some sudden understanding of God, or a clear answer to our prayers in the way we want them. "Grace can be the experience of a second wind, when even though what you want is clarity and resolution, what you get is stamina and poignancy and the strength to hang on. Through the most ordinary things...life is transformed."

Lamott appropriately follow up the section on "Help" with the prayer of "Thanks." More than a prayer, Lamott seeks for us to live a life of gratitude. This has the danger of sliding into banal platitudes, but Lamott refuses to lose that essential, theological language. "Thanks" is not simply what we say to God, but is seen in our actions as well. And it needs, she argues, to be a habit.

The final prayer, "Wow," is not so much about words as our reaction to the divine. "Wow, is often offered with a gasp, a sharp intake of breath, when we can't think of another way to capture the sight of shocking beauty or destruction, of a sudden unbidden insight or an unexpected flash of grace." Such reactions are not limited to beautiful sunsets, but can be found in art galleries and at the sight of a natural disaster. It is the sense of awe which becomes increasingly difficult to grasp as the world manufactures more ways to confuse our senses. But sooner or later, and they are not rare events, we come to face the awe-inspiring, and we say "wow."

Lamott, in her usual style, has taken a challenging topic and made it very accessible. The reader will finish feeling good about their prayer life, even if it is nonexistent. And then they will feel like they can pray if they want to. In fact, as Lamott's simple prayers show, we may be praying without even knowing it.

Article first published as Book Review: Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers by Anne Lamott on Blogcritics.

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### **Abby says**

"Let's not get bogged down on whom or what we pray to. let's just say prayer is a communication from our hearts to the great mystery, or Goodness, or Howard; to the animating energy of love we are sometimes bold enough to believe in; to something unimaginably big, and not us. we could call this force Not Me, and Not Preachers Onstage with a Choir of 800. or for convenience we could just say "God". A wonderful, quick read about real and imperfect faith in real and imperfect people. People whose faith sometimes means that they doubt God, question Him, and have to be completely broken and at the bottom to look up and find him at all. Anne Lamott makes her faith relatable and real as opposed to stuffy and traditional.

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### **Scott Freeman says**

I'm so thankful for this book. Prayer is a concept I struggle with greatly and this has been one of the best reflections on the subject that I have encountered in a long time. It's not a theological treatise but is, instead, a personal reflection on surrender and searching.

I don't share Lamott's more optimistic approach on things and that is all the more reason why this is such an important read for me.

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### **Sarah says**

Love Anne Lamott's writing. "like" her FB page if you want some great occasional doses of brilliance and wit.

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### **Don says**

I am a tremendous admirer of Anne Lamott and her many books. I've been looking forward to reading this book for some weeks. Now that I have, I must say that I am disappointed.

First, the book is way too expensive for the length that it is. And I am not even sure if it was worth being made into a hard cover.

Second, the book really did not strike me as being profound or even notable. While there are some good ideas in Help, Thanks, Wow - they are not terribly radical or new. Unless one is rather new to spirituality, most of the material in this book is a narrative repackaging of the much larger themes common to many world religions - Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, etc.

Third, I found reading the book to be much like reading Anne Lamott's latest posts on Facebook. Her writing style was not the same quality as is found in her other books. Rather, it left me with the feeling that she was rambling. (Perhaps, much like my review.) To get a sense of the writing in Help, Thanks, Wow, read her Facebook posts. Sure, they can be amusing or you may find yourself relating to her experiences. But don't

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plan on going back to them for later inspiration.

I must confess, I am sad to write this review. I really have enjoyed Anne's books and have found her story to be inspiring. But regarding this book, I can't share that same praise.

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## Colby says

This book kinda reads like a first draft. Like a good idea Anne had. So maybe she started writing wise snippets. Really rich little nuggets. And put them in her snippet jar. After a while, it would look like a fruit salad of paper. All different colors, and different folds.

Then one day she emptied out her snippet jar, and voila! Because she is who she is, she got to type it all up and have it published.

It's not really very cohesive.

But that's okay, because still... it's Anne Lamott. It's a short, rich little nugget. So if I ever need to deal with unpleasant things floating through my thoughts, I can take a quick nip of Help. Thanks. Wow.

Some of my favorites:

"Prayer is communication from the heart to that which surpasses understanding." p.1

"Prayer means that, in some unique way, we believe we're invited into a relationship with someone who hears us when we speak in silence." p.4

"Prayer is taking a chance that against all odds and past history, we are loved and chosen, and do not have to get it together before we show up." p.6

## Help

"I know beyond a shadow of a doubt, with no proof, that my grandfather prayed for all of us kids. And as it turns out, if one person is praying for you, buckle up. Things can happen." p.19

'I slept and dreamt that life was joy.

I awoke and saw that life was service.

I acted and behold, service was joy.' - Rabindranath Tagore

## Thanks

"In the face of everything, we slowly come through. We manage to make new constructs and baskets to hold what remains, and what has newly appeared. We come to know - or reconnect with - something rich and okay about ourselves. And at some point, we cast our eyes to the beautiful skies, above all the crap we're wallowing in, and we whisper, "Thank you." p.51

"Revelation is not for the faint of heart. Some of us with tiny paranoia issues think that so much information and understanding is being withheld from us - by colleagues, by family, by life, by God - knowledge that would save us, and help us break the code and enable us to experience life with peace and amusement. But in our quieter moments we remember that (a) there are no codes, and (b) if you are paying attention, plenty is

being revealed. We are too often distracted by the need to burnish our surfaces, to look good so that other people won't know what screwed-up messes we are, or our mate or kids or finances, are. But if you gently help yourself back to the present moment, you see how life keeps stumbling along and how you may actually find your way through another ordinary or impossible day. Details are being revealed, and they will take you out of yourself, which is heaven, and you will have a story to tell, which is salvation that again and again saves us, the way Jesus saves some people, or the way sobriety does. Stories to tell or hear - either way, it's medicine. The Word." p.52-53

"The marvel is only partly that somehow you lured them into your web twenty years ago, forty years ago, and they totally stuck with you. The more astonishing thing is that these greatest of all possible people feel the same way about you - horrible, grim, self-obsessed you. They say - or maybe I said - that a good marriage is one in which each spouse secretly thinks he or she got the better deal, and this is true also of our bosom friendships. You could almost flush with appreciation. What a great scam, to have gotten people of such extreme quality and loyalty to think you are stuck with them. Oh my God. Thank you." p.57-58

"A nun I know once told me she kept begging God to take her character defects away from her. After years of this prayer, God finally got back to her: 'I'm not going to take anything away from you, you have to give it to Me.'" p.63

Wow

"I said 'God' at my own house when a family friend, a man of eighty, recited Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' one drunken evening with twenty old friends gathered around. That tableau is like a thumbprint on my heart." p.77

"In museums, when we behold framed greatness, genius embracing passion, obsession, discipline, and possibly madness, our mouths drop open. For a short time, we see past all that is jumbled, mysterious, marvelous, and ugly. Instead, we glimpse life, beauty, grief, or evil, love captured and truth held up to the light. Art makes it hard to ignore truth, that Life explodes and blooms, consumes, rots and radiates and slithers, that eternity really is in a blade of grass." p.82-83

Amen

"I pray not to be such a whiny, self-obsessed baby, and give thanks that I am not quite as bad as I used to be (talk about miracles). Then something comes up, and I overreact and blame and sulk, and it feels like I haven't made any progress at all. But it turns out I'm less of a brat than before, and I hit the reset button much sooner, shake it off and get my sense of humor back. That we and those we love have lightened up over the years is one of the most astonishing sights we will ever witness." p.95-96

"To have prayed to know God's care first-hand, without mediation, and to give thanks for the gift. To know that God's maternal hands hold one's life, like a baby." p.98-99

And did you get what  
you wanted from this life, even so?  
I did.  
And what did you want?  
To call myself beloved, to feel myself  
beloved on the earth.  
-Raymond Carver

I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God. It changes me. -C.S. Lewis

"Prayer brings me back to my heart, from the treacherous swamp of my mind. It brings me back to the now."  
p.100

"You've heard it said that when all else fails, follow instructions. So we breathe, try to slow down and pay attention, try to love and help God's other children, and-hardest of all, at least to me-learn to love our depressing, hilarious, mostly decent selves. We get thirsty people water, read to the very young and old, and listen to the sad. We pick up litter and try to leave the world a slightly better place for our stay here." p. 101

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## **Melissa says**

Lamont is the kind of person I would want as a friend: real, honest, funny, sincere, intelligent, kind, tough, and delightfully imperfect. Her book is filled with gems of stories and beautiful descriptions. On page 11 she calls herself a "crabby optimist." I love that paradox and can relate. My favorite prayer was on page 67 when she was experiencing frustration and disappointment. She prayed, "'Help me not be such an ass.' (This is actually the fourth great prayer...)." More of us, including myself, need to say that prayer.

One of my favorite descriptions was in the Wow chapter, page 88. "So you eat one berry slowly savoring the sweetness and slight resistance, and after sucking the purple juice off your fingers you say: Wow. That tasted like a very hot summer afternoon when I was about seven and walked barefoot down the dirt road to pick them off the wild blackberry bushes out by the goats. Pedro and Easter, in the McKegneys' field. Wow. The blackberries tasted like sweet purple nectar, not dusty exactly, but dusted just right, not quite leafy but still alive, a little bitter around the seed, juicy and warm with sunshine."

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## **Angie Vallejo says**

First of all, it needs to be said that if you are an evangelical type believer, you will probably not like this book. It is very very much Prayer 101 or "Christianity lite", if you can even call it that; it definitely has a more secular feel. This book basically gives Anne's viewpoint of how she feels prayer works, with three different simple prayers. Although she tries to make prayer sound more "normal" for the unchurched and encourages people to pray in their own way, she still makes God sound too unapproachable by using commonalities such as "the Force", "Something" and "higher power." She even refers to God as a "Her." (Pg 25) and there is a general irreverence, although for her, she is probably writing to her regular readers. On chapters "Thanks" and "Wow", it really comes across as a book on gratitude, more than prayer. She offers a few great memorable quotes here and there, but there wasn't enough for me to grasp hold of, even though I did read the entire book.

She gives credit to her church and pastor at the end of the book, but in the introduction she probably should have been more clear that this book was a result of the current journey that she is on, and she is giving her own opinions. The reason that I say this is because there is no talk about God's grace or His love and how much He wants a relationship with us. Explaining the "help" prayers, you feel as though these "when you need them" prayers are a one-sided conversation, followed with a humanistic conclusion as to why the prayer was "answered" as it was. There is so much more to prayer than this! But again, this is Anne's summary of how prayer works, and it is probably her way of encouraging others to take another look at God and prayer if they haven't before. And I can't say that is bad, but it doesn't give readers any hope that there can really be more. I appreciated her positive look on life, and how to be more grateful and responsive to the wonders of life.

I just hope Anne continues on her journey and learns more about what God can really offer instead of staying

on this simplistic plateau of impersonality towards prayer While this is an attempt at a "spiritual" book, it is not one on faith. I think she should stay with her fiction.

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### Neal Washburn says

I have truly enjoyed reading anything written by Anne Lamott. I first became interested in reading Ms. Lamott when I read her quote: "You can safely assume that you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do." Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers, like her other works, resonates with my spirit. This is a quick read, and I will need to read it again! As I was reading, I felt the resonance of Ms. Lamott's words, thoughts, themes and the like. I felt in-tune with the world, spirit, God... These three essential prayers: Help, Thanks, and Wow really do serve to remind us that prayer is interactive, prayer does not need to be complicated, and prayer can be the time that deep speaks to deep, and deep listens to deep.

Ms. Lamott's illustrative anecdotes are familiar and meaningful. Look for her story of 'Mason's song.' As I read this piece, I was most certainly moved beyond where I was to experience Help, Thanks, and Wow all at the same time! Amen! I recommend reading Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers wholeheartedly and hope that it resonates with your spirit the way that it has with mine.

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### Melissa says

The older I get, the more I realize that I need something to have faith in. I find there's really nothing like being raised Catholic for turning someone into an atheist, and for many years I indentified myself as one. In my 20s, I was content to say that I wasn't scared of dying, convincing myself that I was living my life to the fullest, that when you gotta go, you just gotta go, and that nothing of me would be left after I was gone. Surely the day of my demise was so far off I needn't worry about that for years & years & years, right? These days that philosophy just ain't cuttin' it.

I had a scary experience several months ago & a terrible dream a few months after that which convinced me deep down in my bones that, yes, I am actually going to stop being alive on this planet someday, which of course I've known since I was about five but now I feel like I Really Know. This end of Me is going to be something I will have absolutely no control over & what's worse is that it just might happen in some stupid mundane way without leaving me the chance to tell my husband & son how much I love them & say all my convenient good-byes & so forth. Maybe I won't end up getting stuck in a fence with no one else around when a wind begins to blow & traps me to where I can't breathe or call for help (holy heck, that was such a vivid, awful dream), but at some point in the future, I will most likely think to myself fleetingly, "There you go, there's the last stupid mistake you're ever going to make," and that'll be that. And as much as I buck against the religious dogma that I was raised with, as much as I find the concept of a whole eternity somewhere as unpalatable as I find the thought of a complete End, I need something to give me hope. I need something that keeps me from staring in terror at the wall after bedtime, wondering if tomorrow is gonna be The Day, as in The Last (I swear that even though I *was* a goth in high school, I am not as terribly morbid a person as I'm making myself sound).

Ann Lamott says that you are allowed to pray whether you want to direct that prayer at some big God in the sky who shakes his fist at gay people & casual sex or not – in my case, that'd be a big not. In this book she speaks of the freedom that I am trying to give myself, to be an agnostic & still pray to someone out there, be it the Good, the Really Real that she references, or Life or Love or Phil or something completely different. I

don't really believe that there's an eye in the sky that can't be stopped & when I get to the promised land, I'm gonna shake that eye's hand, as Isaac Brock would say, but I do think there's got to be something more to just being Here today & Gone tomorrow. So I use a method very like this. I say Help. Help me to not hate my mom so much. Help me to be more patient with my son. Help me be nicer to people at work. Thanks for putting this man & this kid in my life. Thanks for our continuing good health. Thanks for the awesome nap I took this afternoon. Wow, our garden is doing ridiculously well this year. Wow, my friend bought me lunch yesterday. Wow, I make great pesto. Amen. I try to believe that these words go somewhere & someone hears them. If it turns out that I'm wrong, well, at least it gives me peace & helps me sleep better at night. This book took me less than an hour to read, but when I was done, I felt that same sense of peace & that's just about the best feeling ever.

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## Patricia says

Just using this spot as a place to keep some quotes.

"I have seen many people survive unsurvivable losses, and seen them experience happiness again. How is this possible? Love flowed to them from their closest people, and from their community, surrounded them, sat with them, held them, fed them, swept their floors. Time passed. In most cases, their pain evolved slowly into help for others." (23)

"They say--or maybe I said--that a good marriage is one in which each spouse secretly thinks he or she got the better deal, and this is true also of our bosom friendships. You could almost flush with appreciation. What a great scam, to have gotten people of such extreme quality and loyalty to think you are stuck with them. Oh my god. Thank you." (57-58)

"'Help me not be such an ass.' (This is actually the fourth great prayer . . . )" (67)

Quoting Matisse: "I don't know whether I believe in God or not. I think, really, I'm some sort of Buddhist. But the essential thing is to put oneself in a frame of mind which is close to that of prayer." (93-94)

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## Lindsey says

I think a lot of readers of this book will have the same initial feeling I did once I held it in my hands, which is "...Oh." This is a slim volume, a little pocket book, and I felt a little misled at first--a New Anne Lamott (nonfiction) Book is a big deal in my world, and I'd been looking forward to it for a long time. And here it was, clocking in at just over 100 pages? Hello? A booklet? What?

Annie (as I refer to her in my diary) is my most cherished author for a number of reasons. I first read *Traveling Mercies* when I was in my late teens, hopelessly devoted to Jesus (but not Christianity), a still often-anxious and "too sensitive" kid, terrified of turning twenty. And I was a writer. When I read Annie's essays, my heart recognized her. The book made me feel less afraid, more okay. It made me laugh. It reminded me to pay attention. And it taught me how to best tell stories.

Fast forward! It's 2013, somehow! I'm almost 30! I can't subscribe to actual literal Jesus anymore but I want to believe in God again so much that I think it counts as actually believing! And I'm holding Annie Lamott's new tiny book in my hand and I'm thinking "Oh. Well. Huh."

And then I read it. And I felt less afraid, and I felt more okay.

This isn't a collection of essays, necessarily. It's a book about prayer. It's a book about prayer meant for anyone. It's a primer in believing. It will help you believe. It appeared in my hands the same way Traveling Mercies did, at exactly the right moment. This isn't Annie trying to get away with something; it's Annie knowing her subject better than ever before. It's 112 pages, but 112 pages of what I can only describe as wisdom. It's Annie, distilled.

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### **Mimi Jones says**

I have read a lot of Anne Lamott and have always liked her hard-won spirituality, quirky worldview and writing style, her broadminded view of human nature - but this book didn't entirely do it for me, though I flagged some great quotes. It's awfully lite, that's my problem. And I have a quarrel with "THE Three Essential Prayers." If we're talking about essential prayers, then I would definitely put "Sorry" in there. I think contrition for our failings is part of the examined spiritual life (and I don't think I think this just because I was raised Catholic). Without "Sorry," spirituality can fall prey to self-satisfaction.

Quotes I liked:

If one person is praying for you, buckle up. Things can happen.

If you are paying attention, plenty is being revealed.

A nun I know once told me she kept begging God to take her character defects away from her. After years of this prayer, God finally got back to her: I'm not going to take anything away from you, you have to give it to me.

Love pulls people back to their feet.

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### **Shannon says**

I have a few friends who don't like Anne Lamott. I am not among them. Here's why: she is brutally honest, unpretentious and doesn't pretend that she has it all together. In my opinion, this is exactly the kind of writer Christian publishers need to actively pursue. Far too many books in this genre are written from a perspective of superiority. They go something like this: if you want to learn to pray, do this because it worked for me. Or if you want to serve God, do this because it worked for me. Blah blah blah. I can't even read those books: they shame instead of encourage.

So it is refreshing to read Lamott's non-directive thoughts on prayer. She does not tell you what to do or how to pray. Instead, it's like she opens up her own prayers and allows you to bear witness to a conversation between God and one of his people. She doesn't imply you should say these same exact things to God or expect the same responses. What she does do is try to show you that whatever your heart is feeling, God can handle it. He will hear your pleas for help, He will give you moments worthy of thanks and you will hopefully be left with only wow.

I ended this book remembering that prayer does not have to be hard. (In fact, if it's hard I am probably not

really praying.)

If you are looking for a book on how to pray, look elsewhere. If you are looking for a book of authentic prayer and honesty, read this. I ended it desirous of seeing the wow in my world and thankful for Lamott's unvarnished authenticity.

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### **Sara Salfrank says**

Loved it. But as I said to my sweet friend, Kim, who shares with me her advanced copies, I am predisposed towards loving Anne Lamott. It isn't a very great way to review a book to compare it with another, but I did just finish *One Thousand Gifts*, which had some similar themes, and I just appreciate Anne Lamott's style so much more than Ann Voskamp's greeting card poetry. As my dad put it (regarding Lamott), she can really turn a phrase. I love her rambling, funny, down-to-earth, feel-it-all sensibility and this short, sweet reflection on how and why we pray.

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### **Bill Kerwin says**

This slim book consists of three essays on spirituality, each exploring a different type of prayer: petition ("Help!"), thanksgiving ("Thanks!") and ("Wow!"), which I feel can best be described as prayer in praise of the sublime.

I have read two previous book on spirituality by Lamott, both longer and better than this one, but they all have the same qualities. Lamott is so frank about sharing her brokenness, all the fragments of her crazy hippie life, that we hope we too--if we had half her courage--could reap the rewards of prayer at least as bountifully as she. And yet . . . the prose with which she describes her life is so elegant--so sleek in its zen concentration, so studded with remarkable phrases--that we fear she has moved far beyond us, and feel humbled when faced with her clarity and wisdom.

That said, though elegant and wise, this book is still a trifle: "Help" is better than "Thanks," "Thanks" is better than "Wow," and the brief concluding essay is inferior to the other three. Still, I recommend it. Clarity and wisdom, humility and hope--all from one little book.

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### **Reed says**

As someone who has rejected most, if not all, of my childhood religious indoctrination, I consistently find Anne Lamott's humor and insights on spirituality and the god figure/concept/delusion/confusion most delightful and enlightening. I love her writing and the turn of phrase that pokes holes straight through the doctrinaire and dogma while raising human frailty and its beauty to the level of the divine. How can a writer touch someone who is convinced he's an atheist so deeply with the kernel of spiritual truth? Perhaps because what shines through her writing, for me, is a celebration of the human condition and our central role in a (humanist) response to the greater unknown, whether she realizes it or not. In any case, she is a special writer who can turn a phrase and create a moment like few others can, and I adore re-reading her sentences and observations and excuses. She makes me smile and be glad that I share the planet with someone like her.

## Lori says

Do you like Anne Lamott's writing? I do, I've read every single thing she's ever written. She is probably the greatest influence on what and how I write; she gives voice to her petty struggling self and I try to do that too, because I secretly know that even you are petty, though no one would ever know that about you, so you are stuck all alone knowing that unless other people 'fess up. I love that about her. When I've been unable to read, at various times in my life, I've always found my way back to reading, and to life, through her books. I've read everything she's ever written, and if you like her too, friend her on facebook for a near-daily dose of her generous spirit and liberal-hearted view of the world.

Last night I read her new book, Help Thanks Wow. I'd pre-ordered it months ago for my kindle, and poof! There it was, late last night, just in time. I was lying awake, struggling in the dark, and decided that her words could probably help. I read the whole thing in an hour or so, it's a short (4 chapter) book. It's a pointedly spiritual book (all hers are, of course, but this one is especially so) focusing on the three prayers she says. Those are my prayers too; you could of course argue that all prayers come down to those three topics, and you'd be right, but those are exactly the prayers I say. In this regard, I am a wordy minimalist. Help. Thanks. WOW. Occasionally my help prayers take the pleading form: pleasepleasepleaseplease.

Helphelphelp (my dear daughter in her grief, my suffering husband in his pain, me in my grief and pain and suffering). Thankyouthankyouthankyou (for strength and courage and love and friendship and all that surrounds me right now, and always). Wow. Just, wow. Pain and love, all at once. Wow. Amen.

It's a lovely book, even though it's short and I wish there were more of it. It's a great addition to my Anne Lamott shelf, and a book I'm sure I'll read again and again. Thanks Anne, again.

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## Ann says

Great book...very short, simple, and amazing ! Want to read it again...and again...to remind me how blessed I am !

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## Ken says

When you read thin books, you always hope that they are succinct as hell -- big books that have been cut to the bone, trimmed to the essence, winnowed to their winning ways. You certainly entertain no thoughts of repetitiveness. That's forgivable with Dickens, Thackeray, and Fielding. They write huge tomes that leave room for error. But the 100-page book? No.

That's my main beef with Anne Lamott's long essay on prayer. I read a NY Times essay of hers that I enjoyed mightily. It told how her family was anything-but religious, how they worshipped at the altar of great writers and lived a Bohemian lifestyle. Lamott cut against the family grain. She got religion -- of a sort. But, in writing about it, she travels six ways to Sunday but I keep seeing the same four-way intersection.

I should have been the perfect audience for this book, which is why I bought it. I am irreligious, yet spiritual; agnostic, yet defensive about God; skeptical, yet trusting in the great unknown. Lamott is similar. She has no

patience for Christians who claim to know "the way" because, of course, they don't. Hers is a most laid-back and understanding God. He (sometimes She) doesn't mind if you say, "God, you've pissed me off this time." Eh. This is what happens when you're in the business of creating humans. Frankenstein's monsters, and all that.

But the three sections -- prayers for HELP, prayers of THANKS, and prayers of WOW -- were a bit circular and the writing a bit meandering. I wanted a more poetic precision from this. The smaller the genre and the smaller the size, the greater the demands. Plus Lamott is the writers' writer. Did she not write *Bird by Bird*, the Gospel of Wannabe Writers everywhere?

OK. Yes, there are some neat moments, like this paragraph on the WOW of autumn:

"And autumn ain't so shabby for Wow, either. The colors are broccoli and flame and fox fur. The tang is apples, death, and wood smoke. The rot smells faintly of grapes, of fermentation, of one element being changed alchemically into another, and the air is moist and you sleep under two down comforters in a cold room. The trails are not dusty anymore, and you get to wear your favorite sweaters."

But overall, I got a "Meh" kind of feeling, like the book needed help, like I owed it little thanks, and like I'd been gypped out of \$17.95 (wow!) for 102 pages.

Welcome to the hazards of reading new books, pilgrim.

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