



Small Victories: Spotting Improbable Moments of Grace

Anne Lamott

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From the bestselling author of *Stitches* and *Help, Thanks, Wow* comes her long-awaited collection of new and selected essays on hope, joy, and grace.

Anne Lamott writes about faith, family, and community in essays that are both wise and irreverent. It's an approach that has become her trademark. Now in *Small Victories*, Lamott offers a new message of hope that celebrates the triumph of light over the darkness in our lives. Our victories over hardship and pain may seem small, she writes, but they change us—our perceptions, our perspectives, and our lives. Lamott writes of forgiveness, restoration, and transformation, how we can turn toward love even in the most hopeless situations, how we find the joy in getting lost and our amazement in finally being found.

Profound and hilarious, honest and unexpected, the stories in *Small Victories* are proof that the human spirit is irrepressible.

Small Victories: Spotting Improbable Moments of Grace Details

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Rebecca Foster says

This collection has a mixture of new and classic (“Barn Raising” and “Ham of God”) essays. The thematic divisions don’t make all that much sense, but never mind. More so than in previous books, we get Lamott’s thoughts on aging and her changing family dynamic. As usual, there is a recurrent emphasis on both being kind to oneself and learning the art of forgiveness. Sometimes it seems like her every friend or relative has cancer, but this makes her sensitive to common human failings: “Bodies are so messy and disappointing. ... I didn’t know that wounds and scars were what we find welcoming, because they are like ours.”

What’s more, this is a gorgeous book: it’s in an interesting font that has these fantastic curlicue question marks; the type is in dark blue rather than black, with gold initial letters to tie in with the cover’s turquoise and gold motif; and “AL” is embossed on the cover beneath the dust jacket. I always appreciate it when a book has been produced with obvious care. Lamott is worth it. I would recommend this as a place to start for people who are new to her writing.

A few favorite quotes:

“All those years I fell for the great palace lie that grief should be gotten over as quickly and as privately as possible. But what I’ve discovered since is that the lifelong fear of grief keeps us in a barren, isolated place and that only grieving can heal grief; the passage of time will lessen the acuteness, but time alone, without the direct experience of grief, will not heal it.”

“Jesus was soft on crime. He’d never have been elected anything.”

“when you do give up hope, a lot can happen. When it’s not pinned wriggling onto a shiny image or expectation, it sometimes floats forth and opens like one of those fluted Japanese blossoms, flimsy and spastic, bright and warm. This almost always seems to happen in community”

Julie says

This collection of essays is more fleshed out than her previous two. I love Lamott’s casual style and self-deprecating manner. She makes grace and spirituality approachable. I particularly like the essays on her troubled relationship with her mother. Not often do you read about keeping your mother’s ashes in the closet on the same shelf as your dog’s ashes! There are many sad and tragic things in life, but Lamott captures them with humor and heart.

Erica says

I'm not a Lamott fan (I know. I *KNOW*, ok?) but I'd also only ever read the articles my friends, mostly women, post on Facebook because they found those articles inspiring and uplifting. I never do. I'm always left with a bad taste in my mind after reading whatever it is she's written. However, I've never given her an actual shot and when Overdrive told me I'd probably like this based on my listening habits, I figured may as well give her a try.

In this compendium, she starts most of her essays by making herself seem unlikeable and awful (they call it self-deprecating humor but I'm not sure that's what it really is) and then ending them with a "But I was human all along!" twist so that we can see she's not awful, we're not awful, and it's ok for us, all of us, to be human. Either that or she learns a lesson and sees a truth.

Also, she has a lot of first world problems.

This book focuses heavily on illness, dying, and death. It's supposed to illustrate the small lights and moments of grace (see title) found in all the dark places but, to me, it sounded more like she is trying to come to terms with the things that burden her like pain and grief, love that doesn't last and love that is overwhelming. More than anything, she seems to highlight her unhappiness with so many things. Especially George Bush. To me, it all seemed less like noticing little bits of grace and more like a laundry list of miseries with the "I suppose it could be worse" tagged onto the end.

This is how I felt most of the time while listening:

There was a point in each essay I strongly thought, "Shut up, Anne Lamott." (I don't really want her to shut up, she makes so many of my friends who feel broken, lost, off-kilter, wounded, and on edge feel better, terribly understood, and safe. I just won't be able to listen to her, myself, after this, partially because I'm not a fan and also because her sleepy, afterparty-hangover (I'm not saying she was hungover, I'm saying she sounded hungover) voice grates on my nerves)

Beyond the cut are the thoughts I had while listening to each essay. In them, I'm as judgemental and snarky as she is, but without the self-deprecating humor, so there's really no need for you to read any further.

They're here for my future use, more than anything.

(view spoiler)

Alina Borger says

When a book starts by telling you that the worst thing you can do when you're feeling self-satisfied, depressed, or anxious is to go for a walk with a dying friend... you know you're reading Anne Lamott.

And when even the STORY of a walk with a dying friend has the power to drag you out of your own self-satisfied, but depressed and anxious existential crisis-of-the-moment...you know you're glad you're reading Anne Lamott.

I'll keep on being glad till I'm finished reading the book, I'm sure.

Bill Kerwin says

Somewhere in this volume of personal essays, Anne Lamott remarks that she has always wanted to write a book entitled *People I Still Hate: a Christian Perspective*. This comment embodies many of the virtues of Lamott's writing: witty, ironic, honest, self-deprecatory, and filled with the knowledge that grace flows from our encounters with people—each as fallible and infuriating as ourselves—and that we, through humility and forgiveness, must prepare ourselves to receive that grace.

The first two thirds of this book-- “Companions” and “Families”--could have been published under the title Lamott suggested. She narrates in clear, apparently effortless prose—another of Lamott's virtues—stories about her encounters with friends and relatives, and what those encounters tell us about human and divine love. She is never self-righteous or preachy, and she is always specific: it is precisely in the details of everyday life that the miracle of love occurs.

I like every essay in this section of the book, but my favorites are the two about her parents. In “Dad”, years after the death of a father she loved, Ann is confronted with a diary of his last days in which he wrote unkind things about her. In “Mom,” Ann eventually makes peace with her difficult mother's spirit when she gathers together with family to spread her mother's ashes. (The essay has two parts, their headings reflecting the movement from resentment to forgiveness. The first part is entitled “Noraht”, after the mis-spelled version of her mother's name affixed to the box from the crematory, and the second is called “Nikki,” her mother Norah's favorite nickname.)

The last two sections of the four--”Airborne” and “Ground”--contain accounts of spiritual experiences high and low not necessarily related to forgiveness. They are filled with fine essays, but not quite as good as those in the first two sections.

Anne Lamott--although she never uses the word—delights in the “sacramentality” of daily life. Her writing is filled with the everyday things that shape our personal encounters—the hugs we give, the food we share, the ashes we scatter—and she shows us how grace uses them to move our hearts toward Love.

Wendy says

I was so looking forward to reading something new from Anne Lamott, and so disappointed to discover very little new in this book. Most of it I had already read in previous books and magazine articles. I was taken completely by surprise, which I shouldn't have been. It clearly says at the bottom of the dust cover, "New and Selected Pieces." I guess I should have paid better attention.

Lisa says

I love Lamott and always will. She writes fiction and non-fiction, but I especially enjoy her nonfiction which is often about spirituality, life's struggles and finding grace amidst the chaos that is life. It's also about finding yourself amidst life's busyness, forgiveness, being imperfect, and love for family, of one's own choosing and by blood.

Diane Barnes says

I wasn't all that thrilled with Anne Lamott 's last two books, it seemed like she had lost her edge, just not as funny and honest as usual, almost like she was holding something back. But this one has her trademark mixture of humor and despair, mixed with a hard but real honesty. This is a mixture of old and new essays, and yes, she still hates George W. Bush as much as ever. Yay, she's back!

Kelly Hager says

I am a huge fan of Anne Lamott. There are a ton of reasons for this, but they can generally be boiled down to this: she makes me want to be a better person (especially a kinder person) and she makes me feel like it's incredibly possible for that to happen.

She's very open about the fact that she's not always a kind person herself, but she continually strives to do better (and from where I sit, it seems like she's succeeded).

I'm loving her recent books, all slim volumes on faith (this is the third; it started with *Help, Thanks, Wow*, which I cannot recommend hard enough).

These are books for people who are a little leery of Christianity and who think that maybe every Christian is only a little bit kinder than the Westboro Baptist people. They make me smile and cry and have faith that maybe at some point we'll start to get it right. And that maybe if the human race as a whole gets it right, we as individuals can, too.

Highly recommended.

Lane Willson says

Anne Lamott's latest work, *Small Victories: Spotting Improbable Moments of Grace*, is beautifully written, combining honesty and vulnerability to create an inspiring strength. This is the DNA in all her writing.

However, *Small Victories* brings with it a truth about Ms. Lamott that I found so disappointing. Her perception of the world has in its lens a political litmus test that filters her entire life. It first becomes visible in her essay about dating, and grows stronger and more virulent as the book progresses. Each person that crosses the pages is quickly judged and deemed left wing or right wing, and quickly accepted or rejected.

To be fair to Ms. Lamott, my sensitivity may spring from the fact that I'm a conservative, and admiring her writing, am disappointed in my potential rejection. The male ego is never far away when rejection is at the door. Ms. Lamott is one of the rare people whose beauty is like light in that it not only shines and draws one's attention, but illuminates and adds quality and clarity to the world around it. It is ever so much more than just being just, or smart, or any other adjective that hides the limitation it places on its recipient with a polite compliment.

I'm quite sad when I think about the friends I would lose were I to filter them based on their politics, theology, or any single aspect of who they are. They are the folks who force me to look at who I am and what I believe. In the process I either grow stronger in my understanding of the things I believe, or change. Those friends who share my beliefs are dear and caring to be sure, but rarely do they offer new opportunities for personal exploration. They offer compassion, understanding and grace, making that exploration safe.

I will continue to read Ms. Lamott's work, and relish in its insight and understanding. I just won't use her ideas as a part of my political platform. Regardless of your platform, read anything Ms. Lamott has written and you will be blessed.

Ron says

This is maybe unfair, but Lamott annoyed me with this book. Her last one, on prayer, had me laughing and crying with relief. But this one left me kind of cold. I found her personal accounts too much like the sensational revelation of memoir and hard to identify with. I was tired of her frequent references to her dysfunctional family (her portrayal of her mother is uncomfortably harsh) and her recovery from alcoholism.

The Christianity she practices (and moralizes from) seems not very deeply informed. More like Christianity Lite. Often, there's as much spiritual insight as you'd find in Erma Bombeck.

There are many cancer stories in the book, but the cancer patient is not herself, of course, and the suffering is something she describes from the outside, as a condition that brings out people's hidden strengths and courage. For Lamott, cancer seems to render them as somehow bravely beautiful, able to stir up a ground swell of loving affection and generosity from everyone around them. The suffering of others seems to serve the purpose of moving the well to little epiphanies of compassion.

For readers actually dealing with serious illness, I'd recommend instead Lamott's *Help Thanks Wow: The Three Essential Prayers*.

Karla says

This is a collection of essays by Lamott. Some were good, some were not. I happen to agree with most of Lamott's very liberal political views, but I have a problem with the disdain she seems to hold for those who do not.

I also didn't like the superficial criticism of her mother's weight, makeup and clothes (the horror of clothes bought at "Monkey Wards")

Charlotte says

Only made it through the preface and first essay. Do we eventually get tired of being so tirelessly inspired? Lamott is such a wonderful character, always so warm and flawed and funny and utterly lovable—certainly that hasn't changed. But neither has anything else changed, there's no sense of progression or challenge. There are totally quotable, marvelously written blurbs, but what holds it all together just reads like a lot of filler.

Taryn Pierson says

I'm not sure how exactly to classify Anne Lamott's nonfiction books--they're part memoir, part religious reflection, part pep talk. All I know is I love them and I'm always thrilled to find out she's publishing another one. I highly recommend any and all of them--and you definitely don't need to read them in any certain order.

Basically, Anne Lamott is the only Christian writer I can read even when I'm completely disillusioned with the church and the people in it. No matter how jaded I am, no matter how despairing I feel at the way our human failings are destroying this precious world around us, I can always find a shred of peace in her essays. She never, ever resorts to platitudes. Tired of well-meaning but clueless people saying that God has a plan and everything happens for a reason after something terrible has happened to you? Yeah, Anne Lamott doesn't say shit like that.

I got to meet Anne Lamott on her book tour! See the full post [here](#).

More book recommendations by me at www.readingwithhippos.com

Melora says

I think this is my favorite Lamott yet. Short pieces from over a long stretch of time (and sometimes the backing and forthing through time Does get a little confusing -- her son, Sam, is grown and a father, then back to being a preschooler, etc. -- but the confusion is minor). I really *love* her emphasis on forgiveness, grace, love, and acceptance. This would have been a five star book for me if it weren't for her incessant griping about the Bush presidencies. I didn't like the Bushes either, and my politics and Lamott's are roughly

in the same section of the ballpark, but she just goes *on*. Related to this, she pigeonholes everyone she meets in these essays into "liberal" and "conservative," and seems confident that these labels tell her everything she needs to know about whether or not she can be friends with someone. I'm sure she doesn't *really* do this, but that's the attitude she conveys here. This little annoyance aside, these are warm, touching, funny pieces that offer a welcome reminder of the ways we can see God's love for all of us through what Lamott refers to in her title as "improbable moments of grace."
