

HELP, THANKS, WOW

November Focus | Year of Passionate Prayer

Anne Lamott, a NYT bestselling author, captures the spirit of our most basic prayers in her book, “Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers.” She offers relatable insights into the ways we reach for God. It is easy to see why a longtime SPDL member says the book “changed (his) life.” Whether in pain, suffering, or otherwise in need, these prayers lead us to God’s grace and mercy. Seeking help, giving thanks and expressing awe are the primary three life prayers.

1 HELP

The first prayer, Help, is heard in every emergency room, death bed, frantic late-night phone calls and car accidents. “Help me, Lord” guides ministers and even children to God’s mercy seat. Even people who do not self-identify as having a relationship with God seem to find their way to this one plea, “God help me.” If you think of a loved one suffering, praying “Help” can heal you both. Help can be our anchor prayer in any storm.

“If one person is praying for you,” Lamott says, “buckle up. Things can happen.” The prayers of those around us strengthen us while we stand in dark places. Prayers are like letting others lean on us when all strength is fading. Help begins when we “crawl” toward God; crying for help is an authentic and brutally honest manner of being. Praying for people who are hurting is like offering “spiritual antibiotics.”

2 THANKS

Thanks, Lamott says, is the short form of her gratitude prayer: “ThankyouThankyouThankyou.” It is often said with a “heaving exhalation of breath,” sometimes sensing that it may take our breath away completely. Thanks also voices a prayer that believes, “God will restore what the locusts have taken away” (Joel 2:25). All that is wrong is made right in the kingdom of God. Saying thanks is a way of finding a renewed sense of God’s presence. Gratitude “begins in our heart and then dovetails into behavior,” as Lamott says.

3 WOW

The third great prayer, Wow, is often offered with “a gasp, or a sharp intake of breath,” when “we can’t think of another way to capture the sight of shocking, beauty, or destruction.” When we are stunned, Lamont says, we are at “the place beyond words, we’re finally starting to get somewhere.” That Wow moment reminds us of the grace around us, like the feeling of watching your grandson running on the beach with his first kite. Lamott’s best description of Wow is “love falls to earth, rises from the ground and pools around the afflicted.

In the next thirty days, consider thinking of these prayers daily and explore their importance to our faith. How do they show up in your life?

Want to learn more? Read Anne Lamott, Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers. New York: Riverhead Books, 2012

