



The Alphabet of Grace

Frederick Buechner

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With characteristic eloquence and insight, Buechner presents a three-part series of reflections that probe, through the course of one day, the innermost mysteries of life. Blending an artist's eye for natural beauty, the true meaning of human encounters, and the significance of occurrences (momentous or seemly trivial), with a wealth of personal, literary, biblical, and spiritual insights, he offers a matchless opportunity for readers to discover the hidden wisdom that can be gleaned through a heightened experience of daily life.

The Alphabet of Grace Details

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Author : Frederick Buechner

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From Reader Review The Alphabet of Grace for online ebook

Valerie says

There is some beautiful language and interesting ideas about grace and about life in this book.

Stephen Roach says

Frederick could write about taking the trash out on Monday and I would be hooked. This book is an amazing work and so is pretty much everything else he writes.

Kent says

This book has a poetic, meandering quality that doesn't really appeal to me, though at points it felt good. Buechner has a way with words that is wonderful at some points and distracting at others (acknowledging, of course, that his way with words, even at his worst, will probably always trump my way with words).

Essentially, Buechner walks through one particular day of his life (the date is not specified), and draws lessons from it and points out grace in it. Is the one's life charged with meaning? Though the unglamorous routine of it would indicate no, the author, looking under the surface, comes to a positive conclusion. "'The dry clack-clack of the world's tongue at the approach of the approach of splendor.' And just this is the substance of what I want to talk about: the clack-clack of my life. The occasional, obscure glimmering through of grace. The muffled presence of the holy. The images, always broken, partial, ambiguous, of Christ" (7-8).

I enjoyed the following excerpts:

I am a part-time novelist who happens also to be a part-time Christian because part of the time seems to be the most I can manage to live out my faith: Christian part of the time when certain things seem real and important to me and the rest of the time not Christian in any sense that I can believe matters much to Christ or anybody else. Any Christian who is not a hero, Leon Bloy wrote, is a pig, which is a harder way of saying the same thing. (vii)

Introspection in the long run doesn't get you very far because every time you draw back to look at yourself, you are seeing everything except for the part that drew back, and when you draw back to look at the part that drew back to look at yourself, you see again everything except for what you are really looking for. And so on. Since the possibilities for drawing back seem to be infinite, you are, in your quest to see yourself whole, doomed always to see infinitely less than what there will always remain to see. Thus, when you wake up in the morning, called by God to be a self again, if you want to know who you are, watch your feet. Because where your feet take you, that is who you are. (24-25, the last sentence a reference to Oblonsky in Anna Karenin)

When Mark Twain's second child, Susy, died, he said that her death was like a man's house burning down—it would take years and years to discover all that he had lost in the fire. (63)

I hear you are entering the ministry ... Was it your own idea or were you poorly advised? (109)

I pick the children up at the bottom of the mountain where the orange bus lets them off in the wind.... Not for keeps, to be sure, but at least for the time being, the world has given them back again, and whatever the world chooses to do later on, it can never so much as lay a hand on the having-beenness of this time. The past is inviolate. We are none of us safe, but everything that has happened is safe. (110)

David says

This is the only book I've read of Buechner, but I will now read more. I thought this would be something entirely different from what it was when I heard the title. I thought it was going to be a straight forward theological work about grace. Instead, it is a beautifully written display of what grace is in very metaphorical language. He talks about grace in a description of his day, starting out in the morning, and ending as he goes to sleep.

The title comes from this thought: "The invisible manifests itself in the visible. I think of the alphabet, of letters literally -- A, B, C, D, E, F, G, all twenty-six of them. I think of how poetry, history, the wisdom of the sages and the holiness of the saints, all of this invisible comes down to us dressed out in their visible, alphabetic drab." God meets us throughout our day, and works through the seemingly mundane life we live. He says, "O Thou invisible, manifest thyself, clack-clack, in the visible day."

It is good to be reminded that God is working in us and through us. He says, "You are weak, but he is strong. You are a pig, but he is a hero. Your legs are broken, but his are not...The alphabet of his grace is sufficient. His jokes are so big and simple no one has thought of them. Walk close."

It is a short book that is well written--the best kind.

Charles Brock says

Buechner brings his extraordinary gift for narrative to a variety of theological and faith topics. He shines fresh light on common and often over used definitions of standard phrases of faith bringing them to life again.

Garrett Cash says

I loved both the idea and execution of this little gem of a book by the great Frederick Buechner. The book is both quite simple and pretty complex, since it basically goes through one day (however meanderingly) and illuminates God's beauty in the mundane through a stream-of-consciousness style. The book does a really great job of opening your eyes to the astonishing glory and grace of God all around you. Either the book will work for you this way or possibly annoy you, since it can feel at time like a loquacious fellow speaking a lot of nonsense, but generally it's an uplifting and wonder-filled book. I would give it a hearty recommendation for more literarily trained readers.

Ben Forrester says

One of the most important books I've ever read. Nothing inspires me to sit and mindfully appreciate the miracles of the everyday life like Buechner's stream of consciousness writing style in "The Alphabet of Grace". It's a favorite and I find myself coming back to it year after year. It's a quick read and one that doesn't seem to infringe on any other book I might be reading due to its autobiographical style.

Michael Craffey says

I really didn't give this book a chance. I need to read it again in the future.

David Coutts says

Like being lost in the articulated daydream of the author.

Ryan Jankowski says

The reviews for this book are nearly unanimously positive. So it was with enthusiasm I picked up 'The Alphabet of Grace' hoping to experience the greatness described in those reviews. I finished it in couple hours and was left confused. I feel like I've walked into an art gallery where crowds have gathered around the work of a highly esteemed artist that has simply vomited onto a canvas which has been put on display for others to contemplate. Or perhaps, to be more gracious, one of those magic eye art pieces where you have to stare at it for a bit to see the picture hidden under the surface. Unfortunately, I was never able to find my way below the surface to see the beautiful things everyone else is describing in their reviews. Perhaps, like many of them, reading it again might get me there.

Laysee says

The Alphabet of Grace is a three-part series of reflections on divine Grace that can be traced over the course of a day from dawn to nightfall. I do not usually review spiritual material I read but I have to make an exception for Frederick Buechner, a theologian and Presbyterian minister, who in this short meditative book, wrote so thoughtfully and movingly about Grace. His prose style drips with lyrical lucidity.

Buechner stated that, "At its heart most theology, like most fiction, is essentially autobiography." True to this belief, Buechner wrote about Grace in the quotidian clack-clack of waking up, having breakfast, driving his children to school, and writing. I marveled at the insightful and profound exposition of Grace expressed

metaphorically and via a stream of consciousness style (incidentally a style I dislike). I was surprised at how powerful it was to weave into the reflections excerpts of stories told by Leo Tolstoy, Mark Twain, and G. K. Chesterton as well as relevant Biblical texts. In between monologues or dialogues with an imagined relative, he also offered stirring, heartfelt prayers.

This is a book that is best read when one is still and quiet. A few times I had to put it aside when my mind was ruffled or cluttered. To be honest, I cannot say I understood this book fully. But I understood enough to connect on a spiritual plane with the familiar struggles Buechner so artfully rendered accessible.

The Alphabet of Grace is a book I will return to often. I am setting it aside for now but will re-read it on my next solitary vacation. In a few days.

Seth Comfort says

I read The Alphabet of Grace by Frederick Buechner. This was a good read that looks at grace and love through the course of one day.

Buechner walks through a typical day in his life and unpacks how God's grace can be seen in even the smallest details. In his morning routine of waking up, getting breakfast ready, waking up his kids for school and heading out to work. He explains that even in waking up to a new morning, we receive God's grace so we can live a new day. This book is a good reminder of how truly blessed we are and how God's grace seeps into every facet of our lives.

I will say this book has some interesting twists that I didn't expect. He has dialog with his inner monologue, it both surprises and delights while teaching as well. A few times I was very confused, but as I kept reading, it was clear what Buechner was point is.

Buechner presents a 3-part series of reflections that dig into the innermost mysteries of life. He presents the significance of occurrences, both monumental and seemingly trivial, with a wealth of personal, biblical and spiritual insights.

I really enjoyed this book and I would suggest it for anyone. It is a great encouragement and a good picture of how God works in the daily interactions and routines.

Beth says

A wonderful read--mixes reflections, fiction-writing, poetry... mysterious and spacious.

Several favorite quotes, which I have a feeling will change at every reading (recommended). Here's one:

"Not the least of my problems is that I can hardly even imagine what kind of an experience a genuine self-authenticating religious experience would be. Without somehow destroying me in the process, how could God reveal himself in a way that would leave no room for doubt? If there were no room for doubt, there would be no room for me." | "I believe without the miracles I have prayed for then; that is what I am explaining. I believe because certain uncertain things have happened, dim half miracles, sermons and silences and what not. Perhaps it is my believing itself that is the miracle I believe by. Perhaps it is the miracle of my own life: that I, who might so easily not have been, am; who might so easily at any moment, even now, give the whole thing up, nonetheless by God's grace do not give it up and am not given up by it.

There is maybe no such thing, old friend and adversary, as a genuine, self-authenticating experience of anything, let alone God. Maybe at the latter day my redeemer shall stand upon the earth and mine eyes shall behold him and not as a stranger, but in the meantime I behold him on the earth as a name which when I write it wakes me up weeping, as a joke too rich to tell on certain silent faces, occasionally even my own face; as a hand which I am able sometimes to believe that only the thin glove of night I wear keeps me from touching." - Frederick Buechner, "The Alphabet of Grace"

Kimberly Lambright says

this book is sort of about the depression of ordinary living. buechner is funny and kind. and the cover is so 80s-retro-cool. he recalls tolstoy's advice of what to do when you keep waking up day after day wondering who you are and what your place in things is: "live in the needs of the day." he gives the idea that nothing is as terrible as we think, yet probably as serious.

Matthew says

I enjoy writing that presents the reader with a stream of consciousness style of writing. This book does just that while taking a look into the heart of a man who learns to accept his life as an act of grace from God. This is a beautiful read that I will read and reread throughout my life.

Justin McRoberts says

My faith life would look nothing like it does now, nor would I have the language by which to express it were it not for Buechner and collections like this.

Landry says

This book celebrates The Divine in the smallest of things: the movement of trees, the space between letters in a word. It transcends theological and dogmatic boundaries and invites us all to rejoice in all that is God.

Andrew M says

Simple and profound look at the everyday, left me wide-eyed.

Susanna says

I love Buechner, even when I have to re-read him a few times to get the meaning of what he is saying, I am in debt for how much I enjoy his writing! An excellent and thought provoking read!

Taylor Barkley says

Short, some great nuggets.
