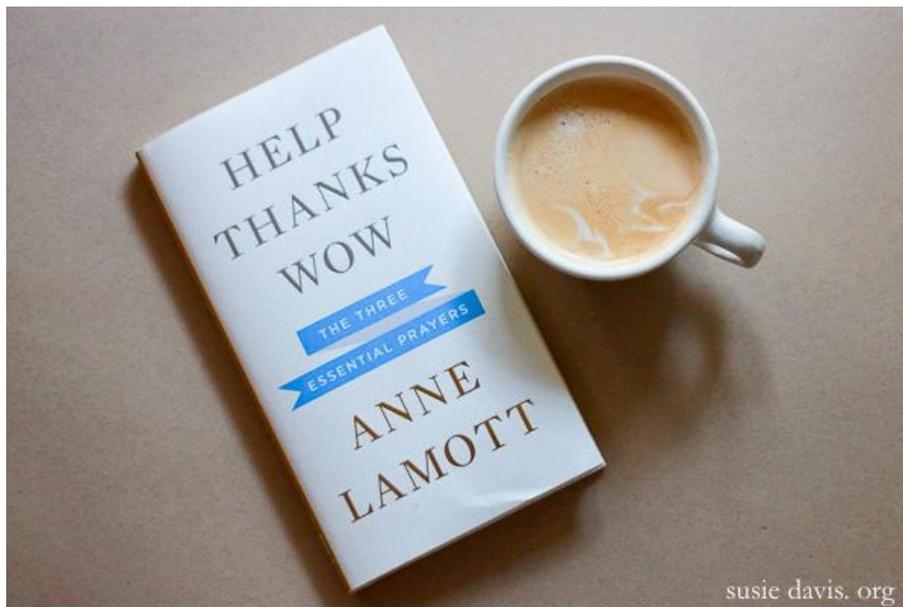


# Help Thanks Wow



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# Help!

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“If I were going to begin practicing the presence of God for the first time today, it would help to begin by admitting the three most terrible truths of our existence: that we are so ruined, and so loved, and in charge of so little.”

“Human lives are hard, even those of health and privilege, and don't make much sense. This is the message of the Book of Job: Any snappy explanation of suffering you come up with will be horseshit.”

“Or you might shout at the top of your lungs or whisper into your sleeve, "I hate you, God." That is a prayer too, because it is real, it is truth, and maybe it is the first sincere thought you've had in months.”

– Anne Lamott, *Help Thanks Wow: The Three Essential Prayers*

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## **Her Legacy**

*For Aunt Cleone*

After the divorce,  
she sent me twenty dollars  
tucked into the folds  
of her crinkly blue stationery  
written hard on both sides.  
No use crying  
over spilt milk, she said,  
still, what a shame. There  
never had been divorce  
in the family. By then,  
I had a child  
and could barely remember  
my aunt's voice, but her certainties  
were plain. No leaping  
off cliffs for her.

The whir of the sewing machine,  
her shelves lined with canned goods  
straight from the garden,  
that was more her way. Her long letters,  
full of other people's news,  
never mentioned  
my father's silence,  
or her own lack of children.  
From a quick how are you,  
she'd go right to  
the surgery of a neighbor  
I would never meet,  
or what a nice visit  
she'd just enjoyed with Elsie.  
Who was Elsie? I never exactly knew.  
But, after all, weren't we all part  
of the great messy human family?  
It swirled around her kitchen,  
where she tied a fresh apron  
around her waist,  
and carried on.  
She would hope for the best,  
she concluded before signing her name.  
Use the money  
for something special.  
Something just for you.

by Barbara Bloom, from *On the Water Meridian*. © The Hummingbird Press, 2007 Educational purposes only. Not for reproduction.

## **Prayer Chain**

My mother called to tell me  
about an old classmate of mine who

was dying on the parish prayer chain—  
or was very sick—or destitute—

or it had not worked out—the marriage—  
or the kids were all on drugs—and

all the old mothers were praying intensely  
for all the pain of their children

and for life—they were praying for life—  
in their quiet rooms—sipping decaf coffee—

I bet they've been praying for me at times—  
so I'll find my way—so I won't rob a bank—

I'll take them—the mystical prayers of old mothers—  
it matters—all this patient and purposeful love.

by Tim Nolan.

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## **Sometimes, I Am Startled Out of Myself,**

like this morning, when the wild geese came squawking, flapping their rusty hinges, and something about their trek across the sky made me think about my life, the places of brokenness, the places of sorrow, the places where grief has strung me out to dry. And then the geese come calling, the leader falling back when tired, another taking her place. Hope is borne on wings. Look at the trees. They turn to gold for a brief while, then lose it all each November.

Through the cold months, they stand, take the worst weather has to offer. And still, they put out shy green leaves come April, come May. The geese glide over the cornfields, land on the pond with its sedges and reeds.

You do not have to be wise. Even a goose knows how to find shelter, where the corn still lies in the stubble and dried stalks.

All we do is pass through here, the best way we can.

They stitch up the sky, and it is whole again.

"Sometimes, I Am Startled Out of Myself," by Barbara Crooker, from *Radiance*. © Word Press, 2005.

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# Thanks!

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Love falls to earth, rises from the ground, pools around the afflicted. Love pulls people back to their feet. Bodies and souls are fed. Bones and lives heal. New blades of grass grow from charred soil. The sun rises.”

“And as it turns out, if one person is praying for you, buckle up. Things can happen.”

“But 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.”

– Anne Lamott, *Help Thanks Wow: Three Essential Prayers*

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## **From Blossoms**

From blossoms comes  
this brown paper bag of peaches  
we bought from the boy  
at the bend in the road where we turned toward  
signs painted *Peaches*.

From laden boughs, from hands,  
from sweet fellowship in the bins,  
comes nectar at the roadside, succulent  
peaches we devour, dusty skin and all,  
comes the familiar dust of summer, dust we eat.

O, to take what we love inside,  
to carry within us an orchard, to eat

not only the skin, but the shade,  
not only the sugar, but the days, to hold  
the fruit in our hands, adore it, then bite into  
the round jubilation of peach.

There are days we live  
as if death were nowhere  
in the background; from joy  
to joy to joy, from wing to wing,  
from blossom to blossom to  
impossible blossom, to sweet impossible blossom.

By Li-Young Lee      Educational purposes only. Not for reproduction.

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## **Joy**

Who could need more proof than honey—

How the bees with such skill and purpose  
enter flower after flower  
sing their way home  
to create and cap the new honey  
just to get through the flowerless winter.

And how the bear with intention and  
cunning  
raids the hive  
shovels pawful after pawful into his happy  
mouth  
bats away indignant bees  
stumbles off in a stupor of satiation and  
stickiness.



And how we humans can't resist its viscosity  
its taste of clover and wind  
its metaphorical power:  
don't we yearn for a land of milk and honey?  
don't we call our loved ones "honey?"

all because bees just do, over and over again, what they were made to do.

Oh, who could need more proof than honey  
to know that our world  
was meant to be

and

was meant to be  
sweet?

by Julie Cadwallader Staub

## Wow!

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“Gorgeous, amazing things come into our lives when we are paying attention: mangoes, grandnieces, Bach, ponds. This happens more often when we have as little expectation as possible. If you say, "Well, that's pretty much what I thought I'd see," you are in trouble. At that point you have to ask yourself why you are even here. [...] Astonishing material and revelation appear in our lives all the time. Let it be. Unto us, so much is given. We just have to be open for business.”

“Wow” has a reverberation - wowowowowow - and this pulse can soften us, like the electrical massage an acupuncturist directs to your spine or cramped muscle, which feels like a staple gun, but good.”

“When all is said and done, spring is the main reason for Wow. Spring is crazy, being all hope and beauty and glory. She is the Resurrection. Spring is Gerard Manley Hopkins  
“The world is charged with the grandeur of God. / It will flame out, like shining from shook foil.”

– Anne Lamott, *Help Thanks Wow: Three Essential Prayers*

## **Snow, Aldo**

Once, I was in New York,  
in Central Park, and I saw  
an old man in a black overcoat walking  
a black dog. This was springtime  
and the trees were still  
bare and the sky was  
gray and low and it began, suddenly,  
to snow:  
big fat flakes  
that twirled and landed on the  
black of the man's overcoat and  
the black dog's fur. The dog  
lifted his face and stared  
up at the sky. The man looked  
up, too. "Snow, Aldo," he said to the dog,  
"snow." And he laughed.  
The dog looked  
at him and wagged his tail.



If I was in charge of making  
snow globes, this is what I would put inside:  
the old man in the black overcoat,  
the black dog,  
two friends with their faces turned up to the sky  
as if they were receiving a blessing,  
as if they were being blessed together  
by something  
as simple as snow  
in March.

by Kate DiCamillo. © Kate DiCamillo. Pippin Properties, Inc.

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## God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Gerard Manley Hopkins



## **Last thoughts...**

“My belief is that when you're telling the truth, you're close to God. If you say to God, "I am exhausted and depressed beyond words, and I don't like You at all right now, and I recoil from most people who believe in You," that might be the most honest thing you've ever said. If you told me you had said to God, "It is all hopeless, and I don't have a clue if You exist, but I could use a hand," it would almost bring tears to my eyes, tears of pride in you, for the courage it takes to get real-really real. It would make me want to sit next to you at the dinner table.

So prayer is our sometimes real selves trying to communicate with the Real, with Truth, with the Light. It is us reaching out to be heard, hoping to be found by a light and warmth in the world, instead of darkness and cold. Even mushrooms respond to light - I suppose they blink their mushroomy eyes, like the rest of us.

Light reveals us to ourselves, which is not always so great if you find yourself in a big disgusting mess, possibly of your own creation. But like sunflowers we turn toward light. Light warms, and in most cases it draws us to itself. And in this light, we can see beyond our modest receptors, to what is way beyond us, and deep inside.”

– Anne Lamott, *Help Thanks Wow: Three Essential Prayers*

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