



EXCERPT



The Riches of Your Grace *Living in the Book of Common Prayer*

June 11, 2024 | \$18, 160 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0816-4

Riches of Your Grace explores the vista of living in the Book of Common Prayer. It's not a guide to its history, but the story of the author's experiences of how its age-old prayers and liturgies have drawn her (and others) closer to God, and he to them—in the workday, the mundane, in weekly worship. It's a book about how the Prayer Book can root us deep in Christ.

A Means to Live into the Bible, Not a Substitute

Nearly fifteen years ago, I was at a weekend retreat off the coast of Washington—there were wood cabins, homey food, occasional views of the snow-capped Olympic mountains. Good friends were the speakers, and I went largely to hear and support them. On the wet Saturday morning, colorful raincoats draped and dripping over unused chairs, we were divided into groups of eight and asked that we go around the circle sharing our names and where we were from, and answering the question, “What has shaped you as a Christian?”

My stomach tightened hearing the last question, and more so as my turn got closer. Was I pathetic not to know? The complete absence of faith in my childhood? The books of C. S. Lewis? Our group's leader clearly wanted something more specific than “the Holy Spirit” or “Scripture.” As the woman two to my left was telling us about her time working in Uganda, I suddenly realized my answer. The Book of Common Prayer. It was a surprise—and made total sense.

Week after week, in the pews at church, praying at home with the small red book, texting a collect to my sister late at night, the prayer book's words had steadied and shaped me. When my kids were small and I was too weary to form a coherent thought, when marriage was so hard I wanted to give up, when my sin felt so acute I felt too ashamed to pray, when I knew I was supposed to praise God but felt little enthusiasm, the prayer book was my life preserver. Its words of grace and confession, its prayers in their set patterns, have been the primary means of God's love and grace to me.

When it was my turn and I answered, “the Book of Common Prayer,” there were raised eyebrows and perplexed stares. Was it strange that a 450-year-old British book could have that capacity? Did my circle-mates find it odd that I had been shaped by saying the same antiquated words every Sunday? I was dressed in my green fleece and faded jeans, but perhaps they thought the prayer book was only for people who wore tweed jackets and read dead English poets in their spare time.

I knew my answer was true—and the more I have reflected on it since that rainy morning, the more I know I was given a gift. The language is old, and the prayers are set, but the prayer book has been constant in showing me its tender understanding of my heart and in conveying God's loving character and steady presence—for what the prayer book calls a “means of grace and hope of glory.”

Anglican priest Lesslie Newbigin wrote in his book *Proper Confidence*, “The business of the church is to tell and embody a story.” I would add the church's business is also to watch for that story, to watch for God at work in the world, to be like my sky-watching husband who sometimes stays up into the early hours of the morning looking for a galaxy. The prayer book has been my window on that story, showing me God in our midst and leading me to become more skilled at doing so. The prayer book hasn't become a substitute for the Bible but a means to live into it.

—adapted from the introduction



Tara Burns, print and online publicity
800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or tburns@ivpress.com

Krista Clayton, author interviews
800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kclayton@ivpress.com



ivpress.com/media



Q & A



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Julie Lane-Gay is a freelance writer and editor. Her work has appeared in a range of publications including *Reader's Digest*, *Fine Gardening*, *Faith Today*, *Anglican Planet*, and *The Englewood Review of Books*. She teaches occasional courses at Regent College and also edits the college's journal, *CRUX*. She lives with her husband, Craig, in Vancouver, British Columbia, and is active in her local Anglican church.

Being Planted in God's Big Story

What motivated you to write this book?

Julie Lane-Gay: I wrote this book to share the personalness and scriptural spirituality that I and countless others have found in the Book of Common Prayer; to give a picture of how it can be a part of our daily lives and deepen our lives in Christ, to show what that looks like.

Teaching Catechism at church, hanging out with students at Regent College (or noticing the small red book in my glove box, as the AAA man recently did), often others say that they like the Book of Common Prayer in Sunday worship, but have no clue what to do with it on Monday or Tuesday. They ask, "If I follow the Morning Prayer service, who says the minister's part?" "Do you say Compline by yourself?" And if they're really honest, they ask "But how does it help you to know he holds all things together, that he is with you, that I am truly, personally, loved by God?"

What is your intent with this book?

Julie: My intent is to walk the reader through how the prayer book "works," both in church and at home—praying early in the morning at home, visiting a sick friend, feeling uninspired at work, worshipping in Sunday services; what the prayer book looks like in an ordinary layperson's life.

Most books about the Book of Common Prayer are written by clergy or scholars, and they are guides to using it. They explain and they teach about it. My book is a walk in it, vivifying ways it speaks into my life and others whether I am kneeling in the pew, too weary at night to pray, or despairing at the realities of climate change.

The Book of Common Prayer has played a key role in your life. Why is it valuable and what does your book seek to reveal about it?

Julie: The Book of Common Prayer offers a way to "find God" in the mundane, to focus on him and draw closer, to see the ways he is pulling us closer to himself. As Evangelical Christianity is increasingly blown about by cultural and political issues, the Book of Common Prayer has the ability to anchor our theology, attend to Scripture, unite our church communities, and focus our daily lives and hearts on Christ. It never ignores our individual personalities or feelings. It embodies life in Christ, how we are created rather than creating ourselves. It is pertinent to all experiences and seasons of our lives. It is an astonishingly good antidote to the secularity of our culture, while still guiding us how to love the world. My book attempts to show how the Book of Common Prayer, through Morning Prayer, Baptism, Catechism, the Eucharist, Compline and death, plants us in God's big story.



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