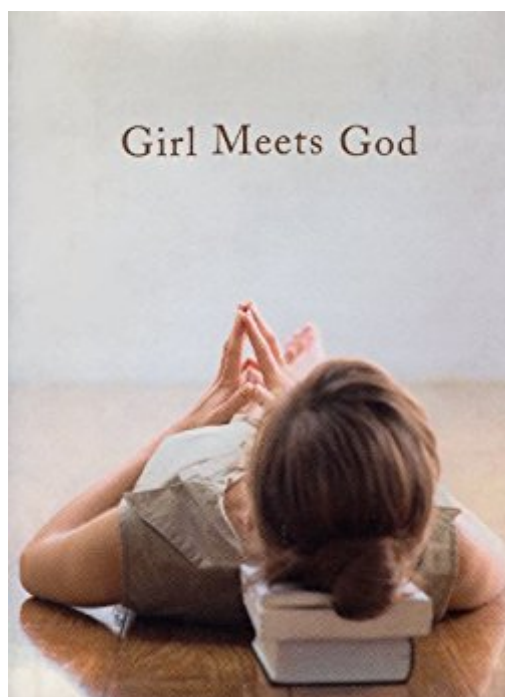


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Girl Meets God: On The Path To A Spiritual Life



Synopsis

Like most of us, Lauren Winner wants something to believe in. The child of a reform Jewish father and a lapsed Southern Baptist mother, she chose to become an Orthodox Jew. But as she faithfully observes the Sabbath rituals and studies Jewish laws, she finds herself increasingly drawn to Christianity. Taking a courageous step, she leaves behind what she loves and converts. Now the even harder part: How does one reinvent a religious self? How does one embrace the new without abandoning the old? How does a convert become spiritually whole. In *GIRL MEETS GOD*, this appealingly honest young woman takes us through a year in her search for a religious identity. Despite her conversion, she finds that her world is still shaped by her Jewish experiences. Even as she rejoices in the holy days of the Christian calendar, she mourns the Jewish rituals she still holds dear. Attempting to reconcile the two sides of her religious self, Winner applies the lessons of Judaism to the teachings of the New Testament, hosts a Christian seder, and struggles to fit her Orthodox friends into her new religious life. Ultimately she learns that faith takes practice and belief is an ongoing challenge. Like Anne Lamott's, Winner's journey to Christendom is bumpy, but it is the rocky path itself that makes her a perfect guide to exploring spirituality in today's complicated world. Her engaging approach to religion in the twenty-first century is illuminating, thought-provoking, and most certainly controversial.

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Customer Reviews

Lauren Winner is not your typical evangelical Christian (if there is such a thing as "typical" anyway). For one thing, the path that brought her to evangelical Christianity passes directly through orthodox Judaism. Therefore, her insights in comparing and contrasting Christianity and Judaism are extremely enlightening. Scholars have debated over the years about whether Christianity is a continuation (or "progression") of Judaism or whether it is a clean break, a radical departure, if you will. Lauren's experience indicates, in a sense, that it's both: to convert to Christianity she had to "divorce" herself from Judaism, yet her Jewish background vigorously informs her Christianity. For this reason, she chose to join the Episcopal church, since its liturgy seemed to be more on the same wavelength as Jewish ritual. I found this aspect of the book to be the most educational, and hopefully Lauren will someday publish a scholarly evaluation of the Jewish/Christian dichotomy. The fact that she is a scholar, operating in the heady world of esoteric academia, and swam against the skeptical tide that seems to challenge faith at every turn, is quite admirable, almost remarkable in this day and age. Yet instrumental in her conversion was Jan Karon's unpretentious Mitford series, which helps bring Lauren's testimony within reach of the most humble seeker. (Just because I personally found the Mitford books unremittingly dull doesn't mean I don't appreciate the way the Spirit uses them to bring people to faith). Another way Lauren breaks the mold is the almost shocking openness with which she puts her life on display. That's not a unique thing among Christian authors (such as Anne Lamott), but it's rare if not unique among self-identified evangelicals.

(3.5 stars) I found this book to be genuinely captivating, insightful, intelligent, and nicely-written. Ms. Winner is obviously extremely intelligent and well-read, and isn't a shabby writer at all. She's also very honest and emotional about her life and religious experiences, even when it could be argued that some of these details aren't relevant (for example, who really needs to know she wears fishnets and doesn't shave her legs?). My issues with the book lie elsewhere. As she goes through the calendar year (mostly) according to Christian holidays and seasons in her newfound Episcopal Church, Ms. Winner weaves a nonlinear narrative of her religious upbringing (she was raised in a Southern Reform shul and Jewish by patrilineal descent), her growing level of observance as she

became a young woman, her conversion to Orthodox Judaism to (as she saw it) make her Jewish identity legit in the eyes of everyone, her days as an undergrad at Columbia, the pull she felt towards Christianity only a couple of years after becoming officially Orthodox, her transition to the Episcopal faith while in Cambridge, and how she tries to make peace with her religious past and present without disrespecting either one. This story in itself could have been so much better had she chosen to write more about her second conversion. While there was ample material on her Jewish upbringing, her pull towards Orthodoxy, her first conversion, and the Orthodox life she lived in her late teens and early twenties, I was left wondering why exactly she decided to convert to Christianity, and why she chose Anglicanism/Episcopalianism in particular.

This a spiritual autobiography in which the author, Lauren F. Winner, a very well-read and erudite young woman, has many profoundly revealing things to say about how both Judaism and Christianity can hold special places in the heart and soul of a person who strives to be closer to God. I fully expected "Girl Meets God" to be one of those books that compels me to spend time contemplating words of wisdom between every chapter; instead, I read the whole thing in two sittings. It's that good. I have to admit that I'm as impressed with the author as I am with her story, which involves converting to Orthodox Judaism and then leaving this for a deep and abiding Christianity. "Girl Meets God" reads like a conversation rather than a sermon. Although she's as clever as she is intelligent, Ms. Winner doesn't talk down to the reader, so you won't have to worry about feeling guilt or shame as a result of religious ambivalence or spiritual shortcomings. Instead of myriad revelations, she's just telling her story, and she's happy to have you listen in. If you've ever "felt funny" about praying, there's a chapter you can relate to. Don't get as much out of worship services as you expected? She's been there. Surely, there are many far more formidable hurdles in the spiritual path. In the chapter called "Holy Week," a roadblock appears in Ms. Winner's realization that many Jews hated Christ and were responsible for His death. At this point she's a Christian who can have no malice toward Jews. Her reconciliation of her faith(s) comes later in a chapter entitled "Pentecost" which contains some rather profound words about spiritual lessons. Ms. Winner's journey through Judaism to Christianity will be particularly interesting to those who find both beliefs palatable.

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