



The Year of Small Things: Radical Faith for the Rest of Us

Sarah Arthur, Erin F. Wasinger, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove (Foreword)

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When Sarah and Tom Arthur were appointed to a suburban church after three years in an urban Christian community, they faced a unique challenge: how to translate the practices of "radical" faith into their new context. Together with their friends and fellow church members Erin and Dave Wasinger, the Arthurs embarked on a yearlong experiment to implement twelve small practices of radical faith--not waiting until they were out of debt or the kids were out of diapers or God sent them elsewhere, but right now.

This book is Sarah and Erin's story, told with humor, theological reflection, and practical insight, exploring such practices as simplicity, hospitality, accountability, sustainability, and social justice--but, most of all, discernment. Along the way readers will consider how God might be calling them to embark on their own year of small but radical changes, right where God has planted them. Each chapter includes discussion questions and suggested readings. Foreword by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove.

For more information, visit www.YearofSmallThings.com.

The Year of Small Things: Radical Faith for the Rest of Us Details

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From Reader Review The Year of Small Things: Radical Faith for the Rest of Us for online ebook

Anna Moseley Gissing says

I have been waiting for this book. I've read many books about "radical" faith practices and tried live them out, but it has definitely been harder in the eight years since we've had kids in the mix. And I keep asking the question--why aren't there any youngish women writing about Sabbath? It seems like the descriptions I've read of keeping Sabbath are just impossible with young children.

Enter *Year of Small Things*. Sarah and Erin know that life with young children is messy. And they also know that they still want to lean into their faith and to adapt spiritual practices that form them into people who love Jesus. They take seriously calls to hospitality, generosity, justice, and simplicity. And not only that, they give readers a peek into their lives to see just how they have enacted those values.

I love this book. It has inspired me to lean in with my own community. When I hear someone ask "But how do we do this with kids?" I will point them to *Year of Small Things*.

*I received an advanced copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Alice Fugate says

This book is less about what new monasticism and its practices are than it is about what it looks like for the authors' families to live out these practices together. In that sense, it is an honest, very human picture of self-denial, humility, and discipline in an effort to carry out Jesus' call for his followers to "deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

As a single college student still financially dependent on my parents, I did not relate as much to some of the topics such as "kid monasticism" (I have no children) or hospitality (opening my home to the homeless is difficult when I live in a dorm). That being said, their story was thought-provoking, compelling, and challenging. I saw how I am neglecting and overlooking several key tenets of Christianity — probably because they seem too radical, too out-there, too hard. But that's why "small things" are emphasized so much. If we only have to have faith the size of a mustard seed, then we can certainly start small in living out our faith. This book affirms that and gives the reader the tools and the boost to give this radical faith thing a try.

Sharolyn says

I'm a big believer in small things. I am also intrigued (inspired, challenged, moved...) by the movement of new (and old!) monasticism but have found that so much that is written about asceticism, prayer, fasting and generally living the Christian life, is written by men, and often single men, particularly in the case of the early monastics. My days are spent with and often dictated by 3 small people so this book co-authored by mums had great appeal. And I wasn't disappointed. Both authors write beautifully and thoughtfully. It is humorous, frank, moving and challenging and has given me a push towards adopting some more committed

and specific practices.

Lorraine says

Recently there has been a movement in the church called New Monasticism. New Monasticism follows Twelve Marks including: relocation to the margins of society, sharing economic resources with each other and opening your home to strangers in need. Sarah Arthur and Erin Wasinger both had past experience with this radical lifestyle when they were young marrieds. Due to job re-location, the authors' families both moved to suburbia and found themselves dissatisfied with their middle-class environment. They made a challenge for themselves to make small changes that aligned with the monastic lifestyle they felt called to. They tailored the twelve marks for their families and held each other accountable for a year. This book is the story of their journey together. Not everyone will feel called to follow the Twelve Marks of New Monasticism. But what the authors are hoping, I think, is to motivate people to think of ways they can make a difference in the communities they are in, one small step at a time.

*I was given an advanced copy of this book in return for my opinion."

Rebecca says

Thank you to BrazosPress for generously providing a copy through Goodreads First Reads*
The Year of Small Things is the story of two families with young children changing their lives completely by adopting a life of new Monasticism or "turning one's life away from the false promises of the American Dream and toward Jesus". I enjoyed reading about their accomplishments and struggles while also gaining insight into the life that I lead. Honesty about their struggles with such issues as depression, money, Christmas celebrations, and hospitality was refreshing. A great inspiring read.

Jan1243 says

Well. I feel apologetic for rating this a 2, but...Let me start by saying how much I love Sarah Arthur's books. I have read At the Still Point, the Lenten and Advent readers and have given multiple, multiple copies away. I find Erin Wasinger a delightful writer. Oh, and I've read and loved (though sadly) The Benedict Option by Rod Dreher.

However, something didn't gel for me here. Maybe it's all the "in" words bantered about in the religious arena, such as "radical," "intentional," "mindful," "new monastic," "social justice," etc.

I think all of this hypersensitivity to the terms we use to describe living out our faith can be way too complicated. This overthinking every aspect of our daily lives, having angst, and even feeling guilty for wanting to protect our children in an unsafe neighborhood are not productive in the long run. Who can keep up with such detailed pickiness, for lack of a better phrase, without losing the joy of the Lord?

Every day God gives us things to do. He puts people in our paths, obstacles in our way to help us grow, and choices (so many!) to make as we seek to live out His simple (but oh so difficult!) commands. I can't help but hope that He approves of the person who gets up, goes to work, and does ONE thing our Lord told us to

do. In being faithful to that one thing, He will lead us to the next thing, and so on.

I should stop. I enjoyed parts of the book but felt an almost drudgery in reading (when I wasn't feeling horribly guilty for throwing caution to the wind and just living my life in a kind of joyful—but mindful—abandon). I teach school (high school) and feel that this is my mission field. I try to be faithful. Every day is radical, you know? It usually starts with an amazing sunrise...God bless. ?

Cara Meredith says

What a fantastic book: you may think you're done with the "year-long" book model, but this brings about a new idea. Radical Christianity and new monasticism - now that's fascinating stuff! And because co-authors Erin and Sarah are so honest, we as readers are able to see how this really could fit into our lives as well.

Michelle says

This book was inspiring, interesting, and very real. I admire the authors and their families and I admit, I actually felt tired, reading about their work and struggles, just in time for the chapter on the Sabbath and the reminders on grace and who the Savior really is.

Melissa says

Very interesting and thought-provoking. A great book to go through with an accountability group or close Christian friends.

Some of the gist of the book, from my perspective:

Covenant Friendship

You can't pull true community together through a book or a movement...

It begins and ends with God, who is the One who heals you and allows you to see others the way God sees them. To paraphrase theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer ... if you're seeking community for the sake of community, you will simply find disappointment. If you're humbly seeking to do God's will with others who are on a similar journey, you will find authentic community thrown in— even with people you never expected.

- 1) Who are your closest Christian friends? What draws you together?
- 2) How would they react if you asked them to hold you accountable to some of the more radical practices of downward mobility (paying off debt so you can give more, for instance)?
- 3) Who in your church is living in unusual, even radical, ways— even if it's in just one obvious area of life? How might you get to know these people better?
- 4) What might "shared life" look like in your context, within your faith community?
- 5) What is your greatest fear about entering into covenant friendship?

Hospitality

As soon as you enter into community with others, you begin to realize that it requires opening your fists. You begin to release your space. You begin to alter your schedule. You begin to share your stuff. Because none of it is actually yours.

Let me state this boldly: if there are no poor people in your church, something isn't right. Somewhere the gospel of reconciliation—between God and people, between races and classes and cultural distinctions—has gone awry.

This is about building friendship, not setting up structures in which you get to practice benevolence. Hospitality Prayer: Give us strength to share everything with those who are in hunger and need.

- 1) What aspects of radical hospitality do you find compelling? What about it perhaps strikes a chord of fear?
- 2) What might hospitality look like in your context, given your current circumstances?
- 3) In what ways might your covenant community and/ or your church provide
- 4) If you were to take one baby step in practicing hospitality this month, what would it be?

Finances

The problem lies in making the comfort of wealth our goal. Simplicity isn't even the goal, however you define it. The goal is formation in the way of Christ, practiced and discussed in community, through meeting needs in relationships around us.

- 1) On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being petrified, 10 being totally okay), how comfortable are you sharing your budget with others in covenant friendship?
- 2) Where do you struggle most with regard to finances?
- 3) What are your financial goals for the next year? The next five? How would you like to be remembered for using your money?
- 4) If you have children, what steps do you take to teach them about money and giving? Or, at the other end of the spectrum, as your parents age, how are you engaging them in conversations about long-term care, insurance, and other end-of-life financial decisions? 5) How does your church economically support its members and the needy in your city? What more could you do to share financial life?

Spiritual Practices (Especially Prayer)

We pray to the God who saves us from thinking we can do any of this on our own neat timetable or by the powers of our own imaginations... This time with God reminds us that we're beloved, mysteriously, no matter how few marks we hit this year.

“The sophistication of my prayer life has gone to a child’s level.”

- 1) How do your church's practices and liturgies shape your own spiritual life?
- 2) How do you see Paul's advice to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5: 17) playing out in your context? What does that look like with your spouse? With children?
- 3) In what ways could your community or covenantal friendships provide accountability for your practice of spiritual disciplines?

Stuff (Materialism/Consumerism)

Rather than asking ourselves to abstain from joy, I ask instead, how could we redeem this (gift-giving, item, holiday)? Celebration, after all, is holy work.

That's what the spiritual disciplines are for, after all: forming us more and more into the image of Christ,

who is both the ultimate Gift and the ultimate Giver.

- 1) Would you say that you own stuff or that stuff owns you?
- 2) Especially around the holidays or birthdays, how easy or difficult is it for you to balance celebration and simplicity? Why?
- 3) Are you talking about simplicity with your closest family members, especially when it comes to stuff? If so, what does that look like? If not, how could you begin?
- 4) How could your church or neighborhood encourage the sharing of resources with the community?
- 5) In what ways are you hoping to grow in the practice of living simply over the next months?
- 6) How can you redeem your necessary expenditures? How can you redeem your gift giving?

Holy Time (Taking a Sabbath)

We do this not just because God rested; we do it—resting and playing, not working—as an alternative to the “more bricks” mentality of the culture around us. 7 We don’t check our work email on the Sabbath, because we’re remembering that God has rescued us from slavery.

- 1) Where is there emotional clutter in your life?
- 2) What keeps you from Sabbath rest? Who can hold you accountable?
- 3) What practical ways can you cut yourself off once a week from the 24/7 demands of communication technology? (Hide your phone, leave the house, etc.)
- 4) How might you talk about Sabbath rest with those in your life who don’t want to participate?

Holy and Healthy Relationships (Vows)

We need this, these holy times of setting ourselves apart from the fray. The support we receive from our community gives us permission to take a new perspective, to lighten up, to laugh. The time apart isn’t a luxury or a distraction from God’s “mission” for marriage or singleness. Fun is part of the mission: laugh so others can hear you; testify to the life-giving relationships God has drawn you to, both within the covenant of marriage and with others in community.

- 1) Have you named aloud to your covenantal friends the vows you’ve taken in marriage? Does sharing details with a trusted friend about your deepest, most intimate relationships come naturally? What model do you have for doing this?
- 2) What practices would help you feel more supported within your community? How can your community fight for the relational vows you’ve taken?
- 3) Who in your church needs support in his or her relationships? How might you provide some of that support?
- 4) Ask a friend each time you meet: What are you celebrating in your personal life right now? Where are you struggling? How can I pray for you?

Participating in the Body of Christ

Dare you claim this family of faith, for better or worse? Dare you submit to this body, even when it veers from the script? Dare you let it shape your identity, your lifestyle, even your sense of place?

- 1) What does “humble submission to Christ’s body, the church” look like for you?
- 2) When is leaving a worshiping community healthy—and when does it become idolatry for us to find a church that looks more “like us”?
- 3) How close are you to your church, physically and emotionally? In what ways does the distance or space impact your walk with God?
- 4) Which people in your congregation can you connect with them to learn their stories and offer support??

Children and Discipleship "Kid Monasticism"

And it doesn't get much simpler than Three Simple Rules, which can be summarized as do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God.

The practices of radical faith must be a gift, because if we're only offering rules, we're woefully on the wrong path. Grace—let's be good at grace.

- 1) What decisions have others helped you discern? How has that shaped your thinking process?
- 2) What do you want for your children's education? How does this influence your family's choices about where to live or which schools your children will attend? Are there negative consequences to making those choices?
- 3) Write down some family principles or guidelines for discipleship.
- 4) Plan to revisit it often as a couple, and then with your children as they get older. How will you know, years from now, whether you stayed on target?

Sustaining Creation

Living simply and living sustainably are not necessarily the same things.

We were participating in some small way in God's sustaining of all things.

- 1) Where do you see the broken relationship between God, humans, and the earth? Where do you see signs of restoration?
- 2) What has been your experience of caring for God's creation?
- 3) Do you see tensions between living simply and living sustainably? How might those tensions be resolved?
- 4) What small thing could you begin doing to better care for God's creation?

Unselfish Self-care

"...part of our conviction about God dwelling in us and being at work around us requires us to take care of the temple he's lent us—and to help others take care of themselves too."

I'm advocating that we be proactive in our self-care by giving someone explicit permission to do some truth-telling... Could we who suffer even go so far as to see mental illness or our bodies' imperfections as conduits of some grace, however painfully given?

This frantic busyness, this resentment of embodiment, isn't merely an "error in overestimating our capacities," to quote theologian Stanley Hauerwas. Rather, sin "is the active and willful attempt to overreach our powers. It is the attempt to live *sui generis*, to live as if we are or can be the authors of our own stories.

You are finite. Take care of yourself. Eat this bread. Celebrate God's victory through communion with your church. Rest. Only then can we be there as peers, witnesses, brothers and sisters in Christ.

- 1) In what ways have you struggled with matters of the body (physical, mental, emotional)?
- 2) Do you feel you could share your story within your covenantal friendships? If you've struggled with taking care of yourself (mental, physical, emotional, vocational), in what ways can someone hold you accountable?
- 3) How do you see radical faith competing against the value of taking care of yourself? How do you see radical faith complementing self-care?
- 4) What's the practice that makes you feel well? Now share that with someone.

Living Justly

"Fear (like sex) sells."

?I can't contribute to change in God's city if I don't know the people God has planted here.

Become educated about the struggles your city faces; God speaks in those details.

As Christians, we are not bound by obligation, guilt, or responsibility. We see this not as an act of atonement for our own guilt but rather as a deepening of a relationship with our literal neighbors. We're compelled only by the love of Christ.

??We can't forget that it is not we who will bring change; it's Jesus.

- 1) What does racial reconciliation look like in your community? What are its fruits?
- 2) In what ways does fear dictate your actions?
- 3) Do you feel drawn to a particular cause or group of people? What fuels your desire to help? What hinders you from becoming involved?
- 4) How does one disconnect the urge to help from the desire to feel good about oneself? How do you know when you're acting out of love for Christ or in your own self-interest?

Jeff says

New Monasticism is a movement within Christianity that embraces communal living as expressed by the church in Acts 2 and within monastic communities throughout church history. It is most popularly expressed by Shane Claiborne. Essentially, New Monasticism has twelve core tenets (or "marks"):

1. Relocation to the "abandoned places of Empire" [at the margins of society]
2. Sharing economic resources with fellow community members and the needy among us
3. Hospitality to the stranger
4. Lament for racial divisions within the church and our communities combined with the active pursuit of a just reconciliation
5. Humble submission to Christ's body, the Church
6. Intentional formation in the way of Christ and the rule of the community along the lines of the old novitiate
7. Nurturing common life among members of an intentional community
8. Support for celibate singles alongside monogamous married couples and their children
9. Geographical proximity to community members who share a common rule of life
10. Care for the plot of God's earth given to us along with support of our local economies
11. Peacemaking in the midst of violence and conflict resolution within communities along the lines of Matthew 18
12. Commitment to a disciplined contemplative life

New Monasticism is a beautiful thing when one lives in a community that embraces these core principles . . . but what happens when one is relocated away from the "abandon places of the empire" and into the wealthy white suburbs? How does one live radically and give everything to the poor when one has children of their own to feed? How is one supposed to cultivate a life of contemplation with screaming children and constant social media notifications? These are some of the questions this book wrestles with.

The two co-authors, Sarah Arthur and Erin Wasinger, are mothers, wives, and Christians who feel called to

the life of New Monasticism. However, like most people who have studied up on New Monasticism, they feel overwhelmed. Is it realistic to try to live out this kind of life with a family in the suburbs? Is one a "sell-out" if they live out a modified version? I wrestled with similar struggles when I graduated from seminary. My school was a bubble of intellectualism, tolerance, and peace. However, the "real world" was quite different. What do you mean you don't want to have a two hour conversation about the social justice imperatives in the book of Amos during lunch?!

However, I was largely unimpressed with the overall book. I can say that I "got something" out of every chapter, but I'm not necessarily convinced that living out the New Monastic lifestyle is the only way (and I'm not sure if that the authors would argue that either). At the end of the day, I feel much the same way that Rachel Held Evans felt in her article, "How to Follow Jesus without being Shane Claiborne." She states that she goes through the following cycle:

"Phase 1: My commitment to Jesus is primarily an intellectual one. He is an idea I believe in, not a person I follow.

Phase 2: I read through the Gospels again and realize that Jesus doesn't want me to simply like him; he wants me to follow him.

Phase 3: I buy the latest Shane Claiborne book, read it in two days, and resolve that following Jesus means selling all my things, sleeping with the homeless, and starting a monastic community. I begin looking into the cost of apartments in inner-city Nashville.

Phase 4: I remember that I have a job, a mortgage, and a spouse (who hasn't read Shane Claiborne).

Phase 5: Heavy with guilt and overwhelmed by the insurmountable nature of my own convictions, I give up and revert right back to Phase 1. Following Jesus, it seems, just isn't realistic."

So what is the solution? One can take lessons from each of the twelve marks without cashing in your entire retirement fund or trading in your work suits for burlap. Evans picks five broad actions:

*"Love the person in front of me
Care for my community
Live with a little less
Push just past my comfort zone
Follow Jesus TODAY"*

I think these goals are much more realistic and attainable.

*I received an advance copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Linda says

If you live and work in the suburbs, figuring out ways to care for the marginalized and work for social justice where you are called to live can feel challenging and discouraging at times. The Year of Small Things offers new perspective to these issues and ways to incorporate the practices right where you are in the comfortable

suburbs. The authors offer much grace and much confession about their own awkward fits and starts on their journey, giving readers the same grace and permission to work through a new, simple lifestyle marked by generosity to others and hospitality to the stranger and care for the earth, all while living in an accountable community.

Underneath many of our lives lies a hunger for this kind of radical call to shake up the status quo. The Year of Small Things could be transformative in so many ways, people, and places despite just offering “small things” to do. Great for individuals, couples, or small groups interested in a life resembling the early church.

“We’re pretty sure we’re not changing the world. But we’re letting God change us, which in turn points us toward the change already happening in our church and city. One small thing at a time.”

Kathryn A. says

It’s been just over a year since I received my first copy of “the year of small things: radical faith for the rest of us” by Sarah Arthur and Erin F. Wasinger. I note “first copy” because I’m on my fifth. I keep giving it away to friends as a “must read.” It’s that good!

From feeling that I’m soaking in advice from a wise mentor to laughing out loud —like giggling with girlfriends— at particularly witty bits of honest, raw writing about a messy life, to full-on face-plant, prostrate in prayer — the result of Holy Spirit using the words on the page to convict me—my response to “the year of small things” has run a continuum. And if I’m honest, I still haven’t finished it. It’s “A Year” and it’s taken me a year...and then some. I keep getting stopped, stuck on important lessons that deserve a bit of rumination, or completely stymied by my lack of awareness of an opportunity that had been in my life all along for more faithfulness or more effective ministry. So I have to sit in it for awhile. And then, after all, it’s “for the rest of us...” and that’s me. I live a life that is over-full, over-complicated, and over-committed, despite my best intentions and despite the wonderful advice of these two sage writers. Arthur and Wasinger have me looking for holy friendship, examining my bank account with a magnifying glass, and asking myself, honestly, whether I even understand what being open to the “other” means. I rarely enjoy books that tell me how to think, but as a voracious reader, I love books that get me thinking. This book does that.

I may some day finish this book, and give it a proper and complete review. But I have a feeling, it will continue to be a delightful, challenging, witty, insightful, poignant volume of an honest look at a trying, messy, but so worth living year — their year— my year— and I’ll revisit it again and again, and never quite be finished. I’ve already ordered three more copies to give away.

Grace says

I was given this book as a gift from my sister who told me that she normally found Christian books boring but had really enjoyed this. I must admit, I began reading it nervously- would it make me feel guilty? Would I be prompted to give up too much? As it happens, it has challenged me and prompted me to think deeply about aspects of my life, but in a healthy, affirming, realistic way.

The book is written by two women who, along with their partners and children, embark upon a year of ‘small

things' - looking at their lives and making changes to become more radical in their faith. It's one of only a small handful of modern monasticism books written by women and it is honest about the challenges of living a Christian life whilst being, in many ways, privileged and immersed in family life. I made a small list of changes that I could make as I went along, and, whilst being prompted to really think about my life, I never felt burdened by guilt or judgement whilst reading it.

Some of the chapters are incredibly in their honesty. Erin's account of her depression is very moving. The passages about accountability and honesty within their friendships are refreshing. The reflection on the importance of self care was particularly pertinent for me as I have been researching self care amongst clergy women. I was very interested in their holistic approach as well as the recognition that burning out for the sake of trying to do too much for others, or in the name of faith, is not helpful- as they point out, the world already has a saviour.

All in all, a great book and one that will have a lasting impact on me. A really helpful way to start the new year.

Liza says

I heard about this book on the renovare podcast. Often when I read a book by Christian women, it is about domestic things: child rearing, marriage, relationships, etc. When I read these other female Christian writers, I feel decidedly squeamish. Their words and the vision they cast have a Stepford Wife quality to them. They are all too often saccharine and shallow. They sell the life affirming vision of the kingdom of God short.

Enter Sarah Arthur and Erin Wassinger and *The Year of Small Things*. Their writing abilities are excellent! They are smart and profound, and while they cover many domestic topics in their Year, they do so with a voice of authenticity. I rarely laugh out loud at a book on Christian living, but I did so many times here. This book is a joy to read! Plus they include excellent reading recommendations which makes my librarian heart happy.

Sarah and Erin's covenantal friendship with each other and their families, their church and their community are things I will hold in my heart and turn over to God. How can the vision that they cast here be reflected in my life?

I cannot recommend this enough! Go forth and read!

Tim Otto says

In the midst of all the urgency, chaos, and busyness of life, Sarah and Erin manage to make room for the important. They try to implement 12 essential Christian practices in their family lives and they live to report on the adventure. Their writing is winsome, authentic, funny, and inspiring. Highly recommended for anyone trying to not only believe, but live the Christian life.
