



Bittersweet: Thoughts on Change, Grace, and Learning the Hard Way

By Shauna Niequist

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“The idea of bittersweet is changing the way I live, unraveling and re-weaving the way I understand life. Bittersweet is the idea that in all things there is both something broken and something beautiful, that there is a moment of lightness on even the darkest of nights, a shadow of hope in every heartbreak, and that rejoicing is no less rich even when it contains a splinter of sadness.

“It’s the practice of believing that we really do need both the bitter and the sweet, and that a life of nothing but sweetness rots both your teeth and your soul. Bitter is what makes us strong, what forces us to push through, what helps us earn the lines on our faces and the calluses on our hands. Sweet is nice enough, but bittersweet is beautiful, nuanced, full of depth and complexity. Bittersweet is courageous, gutsy, audacious, earthy.

“This is what I’ve come to believe about change: it’s good, in the way that childbirth is good, and heartbreak is good, and failure is good. By that I mean that it’s incredibly painful, exponentially more so if you fight it, and also that it has the potential to open you up, to open life up, to deliver you right into the palm of God’s hand, which is where you wanted to be all long, except that you were too busy pushing and pulling your life into exactly what you thought it should be.

“I’ve learned the hard way that change is one of God’s greatest gifts, and most useful tools. Change can push us, pull us, rebuke and remake us. It can show us who we’ve become, in the worst ways, and also in the best ways. I’ve learned that it’s not something to run away from, as though we could, and that in many cases, change is a function of God’s graciousness, not life’s cruelty.”

Niequist, a keen observer of life with a lyrical voice, writes with the characteristic warmth and honesty of a dear friend: always engaging, sometimes challenging, but always with a kind heart. You will find Bittersweet savory reading, indeed.

“This is the work I’m doing now, and the work I invite you into: when life is

sweet, say thank you, and celebrate. And when life is bitter, say thank you, and grow.”

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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Niequist (*Cold Tangerines*) returns with an often humorous and always contemplative series of personal essays on bittersweet experiences, illustrating through her own life that "rejoicing is no less rich even when it contains a splinter of sadness." Spiritually, the book bravely sets out to decipher the paradoxically co-dependent nature of happiness and grief. But Niequist's title should not be seen as simply a convenient theological metaphor; it is also a literary device. Impressively, many of Niequist's perfectly concocted chapters weave in culinary themes, evoking the sensory, physical experience of the bittersweet along with the spiritual sense of it. When writing of deep friendship and the loss that sometimes accompanies it, her narrative often revolves around a dinner table, a cooking club, or a farmer's market. Niequist's ability to describe the sensation of eating a peppery arugula salad punctuated with sweet blueberries is just as evocative as her ability to express the intricacies of love, loss, hope, and doubt. Readers of all faiths will find this book courageous, sincere, poetic, and profound. There's nothing bitter in this sweet treat of a spiritual memoir.

From [Booklist](#)

This very personal book offers a modest, gentle, and, yes, bittersweet reflection on life and life-changing moments. In a collection of interweaving essays, Niequist provides "an ode to all things bittersweet, to life at the edges, a love letter to what change can do in us." To Niequist, change is a good thing even if "incredibly painful." In a short period of time, she became pregnant, lost a job she loved, had a baby, and wrote a book. She didn't lose her faith as much as lost track of it. These short pieces capture moments when her world seemed to be spiraling out of control. Stunned by the loss of her beloved grandmother, she discovers that the best way to honor her life is to live in simplicity and kindness. *Bittersweet* is full of such small but important lessons of daily living, about how to live life again "after the brokenness." Niequist firmly believes that it is the stories of ordinary people that can make a difference in people's lives. "There is nothing small or inconsequential about our stories," she concludes. "There is, in fact, nothing bigger." --June Sawyers

Review

Niequist (*Cold Tangerines*) returns with an often humorous and always contemplative series of personal essays on bittersweet experiences, illustrating through her own life that 'rejoicing is no less rich even when it contains a splinter of sadness.' Spiritually, the book bravely sets out to decipher the paradoxically co-dependent nature of happiness and grief. But Niequist's title should not be seen as simply a convenient theological metaphor; it is also a literary device. Impressively, many of Niequist's perfectly concocted chapters weave in culinary themes, evoking the sensory, physical experience of the bittersweet along with the spiritual sense of it. When writing of deep friendship and the loss that sometimes accompanies it, her narrative often revolves around a dinner table, a cooking club, or a farmer's market. Niequist's ability to describe the sensation of eating a peppery arugula salad punctuated with sweet blueberries is just as evocative as her ability to express the intricacies of love, loss, hope, and doubt. Readers of all faiths will find this book courageous, sincere, poetic, and profound. There's nothing bitter in this sweet treat of a spiritual memoir. (July) -- Publishers Weekly, starred review (Publishers Weekly) (*Publishers Weekly*)

Writing with another tasty theme in mind, Niequist (*Cold Tangerines*) sees bittersweetness as 'the idea that in all things there is both something broken and something beautiful, that there is a sliver of lightness on even the darkest of nights, a shadow of hope in every heartbreak.' In *Bittersweet: Thoughts on Change, Grace, and Learning the Hard Way*, she shines light in that darkness, thanks to her own journey through change and

heartbreak and questions and doubt, through her struggle to find good and God in the messiness of life. Niequist and her husband faced job changes, a move and miscarriages, all rendered here in the smooth language and deep honesty that defines her style as a writer. She's honest, too, about the good things---food, friends, family. Her short essays allow a glimpse into her life, but, more importantly, her heart. Readers searching for an honest look at the bitter and sweet of life will find it here; those looking for fine writing and God in the day to day will experience that here as well. (*Christian Retailing*)

This very personal book offers a modest, gentle, and, yes, bittersweet reflection on life and life-changing moments. In a collection of interweaving essays, Niequist provides “an ode to all things bittersweet, to life at the edges, a love letter to what change can do in us.” To Niequist, change is a good thing even if “incredibly painful.” In a short period of time, she became pregnant, lost a job she loved, had a baby, and wrote a book. She didn’t lose her faith as much as lost track of it. These short pieces capture moments when her world seemed to be spiraling out of control. Stunned by the loss of her beloved grandmother, she discovers that the best way to honor her life is to live in simplicity and kindness. Bittersweet is full of such small but important lessons of daily living, about how to live life again “after the brokenness.” Niequist firmly believes that it is the stories of ordinary people that can make a difference in people’s lives. “There is nothing small or inconsequential about our stories,” she concludes. “There is, in fact, nothing bigger.” (*Booklist*)

BITTERSWEET: THOUGHTS ON CHANGE, GRACE, AND LEARNING THE HARD WAY provides an outstanding survey which maintains that to live a balanced life, we need both the bitter and the sweet. Bittersweet contains depth and complexity: it's offered in change and in recognition of spiritual gifts, and is presented here as a positive, moving force in any life. (*The Midwest Book Review*)

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