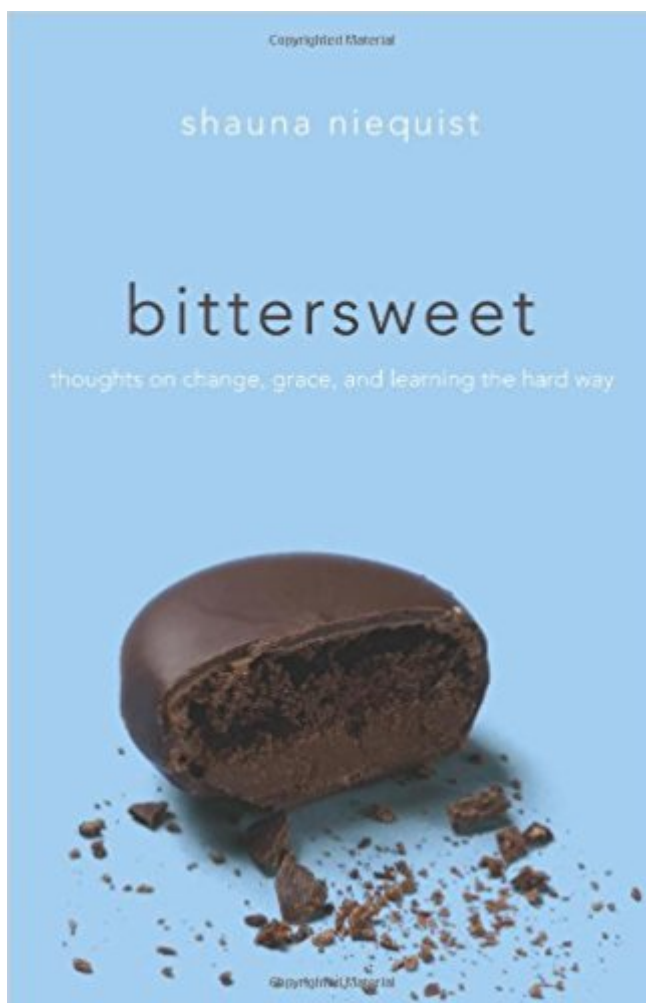


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# Bittersweet: Thoughts On Change, Grace, And Learning The Hard Way



## Synopsis

“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.”

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

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

--This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

I almost didn't purchase this book based on a negative review. But my daughter had recommended it. And I trust her recommending abilities. While the negative reviewer referred to the author as a whiner, I thought Ms. Niequist did an excellent job providing a \*real\* glimpse into her life - bravely and with good humor. The book is a collection of essays during a trying season, written beautifully in words that aren't your standard Christian-ese. Which is a good thing. If you're looking for an in-depth women's Bible study, this book isn't that. But it would make a great book club selection as it provides insight into lessons we can learn from the good and from the good hard. Recommended read.

I love the way Shauna Niequist uses details to bring her memories to life. However, I found myself annoyed by the structure of the book. The chapters felt as if they were out of order, bouncing around haphazardly. I would compare this book to dropping a loose-leaf journal, pages scatter everywhere, and gathering them up carelessly. I was expecting her to go a little deeper by including some life applications and more Jesus, but it was simply a compilation of journal entries. \*I think it is important to note that everyone else in my book club LOVED this book.

Shauna Niequist is such a good and relatable story teller. I admire her ability to tell a painful story and make it real and hopeful at once. I so appreciate her beauty and honesty. This book and all her books are worth it!

If it were any other time, any other season, I probably wouldn't have picked this up from the Kindle store. I wouldn't have looked at this twice, because I don't think it's for me, or I would be interested. When was the last time I read a non-fiction, self-help book like this? I can't remember. But I know for sure that if it were any other time early this year, or if it were any other season in my life, I wouldn't have decided to get Bittersweet by Shauna Niequist and read it immediately after it loaded on Hannah the Kindle. Oh, I guess it helped that the ebook was on sale when I saw it, so I bought it. But still, I wouldn't have gotten it and enjoyed it as much as I did if it were any other time of my life. Bittersweet: Thoughts on Change, Grace and Learning the Hard Way by Shauna Niequist is about so many things, but mostly, about how life is bittersweet. How life isn't always happy or sweet but we shouldn't let the bitterness of it get to us. There is such a thing as bittersweet, and it's the kind of life that we should appreciate, especially because all the learning and the changes and

(most importantly) grace is seen in the bittersweet parts of life. This is a collection of essays and realizations about her life, and what she learned from them -- from her fights with her husband to moving to a new place, from meeting new friends, having parties and serving them food and these friends moving away. From her problems getting pregnant again to broken hearts, family members dying and babies being born. The book is an honest collection of stories that the reader will definitely relate to at some point, and drives the point that life is really bittersweet. Like I said, if I read this at any other time, I don't think it would have made as much of a big impact as it did now. Bittersweet kept me company during the hard days, and spoke to me over and over and over again about grace and God's faithfulness. I couldn't relate to some of the stories Niequist wrote because I don't have a family, and I haven't moved away yet, but the lessons she talked about were universal, and somehow I felt like she really knew what heartache is, and she can relate to me. Her words served like a balm to my soul, and some passages made me cry several times because it felt like they were exactly what I needed to read. In a way, it seemed like a promise, too -- that whatever you're going through, whatever your situation is, God knows it, and He will take you through it. It's not easy, but you have a choice to view your situation as bittersweet. And from her words, it seemed like she's healed and moved on from the hard parts of her life and if she can do it, then you definitely can, too. I needed that, and as I read the book more, I realize that maybe it was meant for me to see this book on , and to see it on sale so I can buy it. Granted, some of the stories were a little repetitive, like stories at the end had some similarities to the stories at the start, but by the time I got to that, I was far too in love with what I've read for me to really nitpick about it. Despite that repetitiveness, though, the stories in Bittersweet were honest and heartfelt and real, and it made me feel that I had a friend in Shauna Niequist, even if this is the first book of hers I've read. I wonder now how I would've reacted to this if I read this on any other time, at any other season. I know I'm being repetitive on this review with that, but I can't help but wonder. Would I even read this at all? If I did, though, I don't think I would've loved it as much as I did now. But whatever -- I'm just really, really glad that this book got to me at the right time. If you're in a tough time, if you're experiencing bitter moments, I definitely recommend this book. Bittersweet may not make your life better in a snap, but I hope it helps you heal, just like a good book ought to do. :)

I am a fan of Shauna Niequist's writing, and this book certainly did not disappoint. Shauna is a gifted writer, and her vulnerability combined with her style makes her books easy to read. I appreciate her willingness to share about several difficulties she's walked through while also trying to navigate everyday life and finding the Lord in the midst of it all. I've recommended this book to several friends

and think it's a great read.

Shauna had quite a few deep and touching insights here, but I found a lot of ideas repetitive, and the chapters were so random. It was difficult to fully immerse myself into her style of writing when the topic changed every few pages. I read this as part of a book club, and it worked well because the chapters were so short and separated. But the book as a whole did not flow well.

As I am currently in a season--or, more frankly, a year--of new beginnings, painful endings, big risks, potential failures, frequent confusion, and profound loneliness, I connected, deeply, with Shauna's stories. Each chapter held a sentence or two that would cause my breath to catch in my throat, "Those are my exact feelings written in words I could not seem to find for myself!" Then came tears; a mix of relief over finally having a way to articulate how I feel--almost permission to really feel it--and comfort from the knowledge that someone else had felt this too, and found a deeper connection with Jesus and community through all of it. I am so grateful for Shauna's vulnerability. I know this will be a book I come back to and recommend to others.

There is one book that every person has multiple copies on their shelf to give away. This is that book. My favorite thing about Shauna's writing is that she writes not as a writer, but as a friend. In fact, most of the men in my life have loved this book because we have all been there: frustrated, alone, scared and feeling our souls unravel with every Sunday that passes. Shauna writes this story in the midst of a multiple miscarriages and learns what it means to embrace change and the story that God is writing in her life -- whether she likes it or not. Although I have never met Shauna in real life, I have introduced her to all of my friends via Facebook statuses and handing this very special book to others in the midst of my own struggle in finding self-worth and worthy relationships.

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