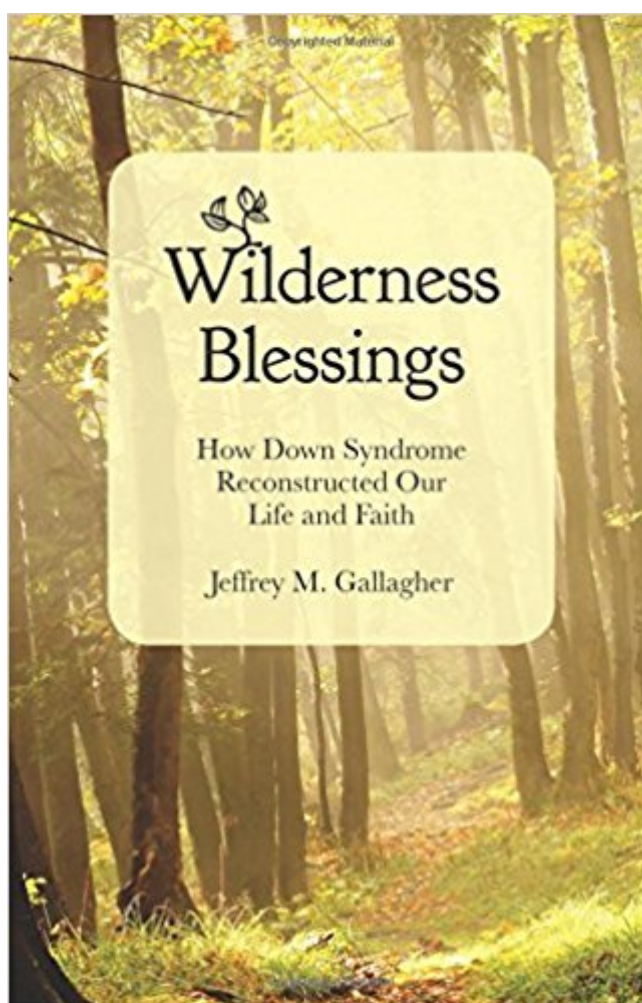


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# Wilderness Blessings: How Down Syndrome Reconstructed Our Life And Faith



## Synopsis

From the emotional and poignant blog entries posted during his son Jacob's uncertain birth, trying surgeries, and first year of living with Down syndrome, author and pastor Jeffrey M. Gallagher reflects honestly and candidly on disability theology, God's place in tragedy and hardship, how the church welcomes (or not) people with differing abilities, and the joys-the wilderness blessings-that Jacob's life has given him. Appealing to pastors, people of faith, readers interested in disability theology, parents and family members of those who are differently-abled, those who are interested in issues of inclusivity and acceptance, and those who struggle with understanding how God speaks and where God moves during difficult times, *Wilderness Blessings: How Down Syndrome Reconstructed Our Life and Faith* is a unique book that gives a pastoral and parental perspective into the reformation of a life and faith that have been blessed by the addition of a child with Down syndrome. After reading this book you may look at life and blessings from God in a new way.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

With wit, compassion, and fierce tenderness, Jeff Gallagher, a seasoned pastor and devoted father, shares the joys and challenges that only an insider can know about how the birth of a child with Down syndrome can teach a family and an entire congregation to appreciate the gift of being just like the rest of us: God's "perfectly imperfect." ~ Marvin M. Ellison, ethicist and author of *Making Love Just: Sexual Ethics for Perplexing Times* Jeff Gallagher speaks with passion and certainty about his child and God's grace, yet, is refreshingly candid about what he does not know about either. Jeff's evolution with Down syndrome and his faith and worldview are discussed as

if having coffee with the reader, not as pronouncements of doctrine from his pulpit. Jeff writes, "I believe faith compels us to make a difference in this world." ~ Wilderness Blessings will make a difference, especially if you've ever questioned how disability and God intersect. ~ Joe Meares, Founder of Dads Appreciating Down Syndrome ~ Wilderness Blessings is a first-person account of one family's journey from expectation, through fear, to perfect blessings granted in an imperfect world . . . ~ Parents of perfectly imperfect kids, pastors who must live private struggles publicly, and congregations wondering how best to love their leaders through the struggle will all find something here to help them through the wilderness. ~ Quinn G. Caldwell, author of The Unofficial Handbook of the United Church of Christ ~ Jeff Gallagher's book is written in good pastoral style: a kind of verbatim, or theological reflection, on the first year of his son Jacob's life. ~ Both informative and heartwarming, "Wilderness Blessings" should appeal to all who are interested in learning more about Down syndrome from a parent's vantage point, particularly a parent who has the advantage of deep pastoral skills and considerable theological reflective capacity. ~ I heartily recommend it.

Jacob Gallagher's uncertain birth, trying surgeries, and first year of living with Down syndrome brought more than paralyzing, anxious moments to his family. ~ In Wilderness Blessings Jacob's dad, pastor Jeffrey M. Gallagher, reflects honestly and candidly on disability theology, God's place in tragedy and hardship, how the church welcomes (or doesn't welcome) people with differing abilities, and the joys -- the wilderness blessings -- that Jacob's life gives the Gallagher family. ~ Families and individuals on similar journeys (whether through health crises or other hardships) will find hope amid the struggles of understanding how God speaks and moves during difficult times.

So well written, fun, funny, thoughtful, poignant - this book was an excellent read into the hearts of a family of faith as they first learn about their soon-to-be-son's heart defect and eventual diagnosis with a developmental disability. Rev. Dr. Gallagher shares his blog posts from his son's first year of life, as he richly describes their "wilderness wanderings" through unexpected and unknown territories with, yes, many wilderness blessings. Life with Jacob brings so many blessings, indeed, to his family, his congregation, and to his whole community. He honestly shares the real life struggles, many to which I can relate as a professional in the disabilities field (funding!) and from stories from the families I work with. I wish I could gather you all together to share coffee, stories, battle scars, and successes. But this story stops too soon - I want to know more, more about life with Jacob in this small coastal town and how their family, church, and community continues to learn

so many lessons from him. Yes, Rev. Dr. Jeff, God does help us go through our wildernesses, whatever they may be. I will be sharing this book with the families I encounter in my personal and professional life.

As the grandmother of a beautiful little girl with Down syndrome, I eagerly read this book, assuming I would find some parallels between the author and me. What I found instead was a rekindling of my lapsed faith, and a deep respect for Jeff Gallagher as a writer, a pastor and a father. Those were bonuses, of course, to the exquisitely written account of his and his wife's lives before and after the birth of their precious Jacob. The journal (blog) excerpts combined with narration make this a work of art. The raw human emotion exuded on every page are akin to a storytelling. I didn't feel like I was reading words. The narration came alive, and I felt like I knew this family and was part of their at-times harrowing ordeals. That's the mark of a brilliant writer. This is a book for everyone to read. It isn't limited to those with a loved one with Down syndrome or other disability. This book awakens the human spirit and soothes the soul. I hope as Jacob grows this author will keep readers apprised of their lives as a family.

So, I finished this book last night. Jeff Gallagher's honest account of the birth of his beautiful son, along with the challenges his family faced, was extraordinary. I highly recommend this book for anyone who is going through a similar situation or needs a reminder of the strength of a positive attitude and/or faith. I'm hoping the author will write another installment!

Jeff Gallagher

Thank you

Reading this book, as you strap into the wild rollercoaster ride that the author has eloquently shared with the reader, you begin to experience the wilderness that of which the Gallagher's experienced. A wilderness not of green trees and flowing streams; but of sterile rooms and monitors galore (and the noises they make), all the while leaning on faith and God to see them through ; even through the obscure lens of bringing into the world a "society-labeled", "less than perfect" child . When reading this book, I surpassed the actual rollercoaster ride of trials and tribulations, tears and joy. Instead, for this reader, it was as though I was elevated from a lineal documentation of these "wilderness blessings," to a shifting of emotions that can best be explained by Roald Dahl's "glass elevator" (think "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory"). Jeffery Gallagher was controlling that elevator,

floating above this unknown wilderness, pressing buttons that shifted in multi-directional paths. This was done in very thought-provoking, experienced way to pull the most emotions from the reader. I was laughing; I was tearing up (a couple of times needing to put the book down), but not once did I feel lost in the story line. I cannot picture a better guide through this "wilderness" and to share the "blessings" than this author. His faith is astounding, his wit and wisdom contagious. I did not want to put the book down, though I had to when I finished or the words became too blurred. To the faithful or faithless, the healthy or hurt, the lost or the found, this book is a must read. I have to admit, I jumped into this book unprepared. As someone who has been working in a field serving those who have been labeled "disabled" and one who has regained a sense of "faith" I felt I had lost long ago, this book struck the empathy cord of and emphasizes why I chose my particular career path and why I became transplanted in my current faith practice (yes, UCC).

As a parent who has been there done that in several Children's Hospitals, I spent a lot of time reading this book and nodding my head. The waiting, the boredom, the worrying, the false starts to head home, the food, the medical equipment, the insurance battles, the community that surrounds you. It's all so familiar and yet it never gets old to read about other families on this journey. I really enjoyed the style of how this book was written - Gallagher's in the moment words from Care Pages shared and reflected on years later. Telling our stories is always valuable and I think there are many people, including people who haven't done time at a hospital, who will connect with this story.

Full disclosure: The author and I are colleagues and friends. That said, I found this book to be a tender, funny, painful and ultimately joyous window into Jeff's life and faith in the midst of his younger son's first year of life. While the condition of Down syndrome is clear and specific, his words really resonate with any parent who has dealt with medical crises involving their children. Jeff writes clearly and well, and is most passionate when writing about disability theology, and the love he has for his family. It's a joy to read - though I don't recommend you read the October chapters in public unless you like to gasp and cry in front of strangers.

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