

REAL LOVE

GUARANTEED TO LAST

*How one girl found God
without even looking*

Anne Peterson

REAL LOVE

GUARANTEED TO LAST

*How one girl found God
without even looking*

Anne Peterson

© 2012 by Anne Peterson. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the author, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.

Cover Photo by Jessica Peterson
www.jessicapetersonart.com

This book was written for to the person who
wants to be accepted, just as they are. May
you find Real Love within these pages.

Praise for Real Love

“A short but powerful read— great for reading again and again. Anne has captured the simplicity and depth of faith, illustrating some of life’s most important lessons through stories that captivate. Don’t let the size of this small book fool you: there is wisdom in these pages that you can chew on for years.”

—Jeff Goins, author, Wrecked: When a Broken World Slams into Your Comfortable Life.

Special Thanks to:

- Jeff Goins for his generosity in sharing his writing knowledge.
- The Tribewriters for their constant encouragement.
- JoHannah Reardon for her editorial skills.
- Jessica Peterson for her photographs.
- Barb Utley for the use of her photograph of Lois' house.
- My husband Mike, for being patient as I worked on this for weeks.
- Lois and Don Peterson, for opening their home so I could meet Jesus.

Table of Contents

1. Love accepts	11
2. Love is personal	21
3. Love forgives	29
4. Love listens	37
5. Love protects	49
6. Love stays	57
7. Love lavishes	63

Introduction

Every person needs to be loved. Nothing compares to knowing you are accepted just as you are.

Some people spend their whole lives looking for someone who will love them. Someone who will complete them.

I am loved. Loved by my husband, my children, my grandchildren, my friends. It's special being loved. But I want to tell you about another love.

I am a storyteller. This book holds some of my stories. I hope you find some encouragement tucked inside them.

I hope reading my stories helps you reflect on yours. But more than anything, I want you to know the love I'm talking about. Because it is real, and it will last forever.

1. Love Accepts

My four-year-old grandson took a long time washing his hands.

"Did you get all the germs Sweetheart?" I asked, turning the faucet off.

"Some of them," he answered, turning the water back on.

A few seconds later he turned it off, announcing,

"There. **Now**, I got them all."

That story reminded me of another kind of washing.



Walking down the sidewalk in Chicago
I felt a tinge of nervousness. Would I fit in?

Certain I had the right address; I knocked
on the back door, wondering what I'd find.

**Little did I know going to this house
would change my life, and my forever.**

She wore jeans and dangling earrings. This thirty-something housewife with sparkling blue eyes.

I felt welcome from the moment I stepped into that basement.

“Help yourself to some pop,” someone called out.

The room held about 40 people my age, early 20’s.

Long tables held stacks of Bibles and scraps of paper. Pencils were scattered on the tables, as well as bowls of chips and pretzels.

The smell of freshly made coffee filled the room intermingled with cigarette smoke.

And then she spoke. She asked for volunteers to read verses. Periodically she stopped, explaining the verses to us. She spoke about Jesus like she knew him personally. Like he was her best friend.

I liked the feeling of belonging. Accepted, just as I was.

I was invited back the following day for another study. There was no thinking about it; I knew I would go.

Opening the door that second night, there were about a hundred people in the room. That place gave me such a warm feeling.

After the study we sat around talking. Lois came over to me, holding a fresh cup of steaming coffee. She introduced herself, and talked to me about her Jesus.

As a child, I had heard about Jesus as a child at Vacation Bible School. VBS was a place with macaroni art and homemade plaques of John 3:16:

“For God so loved the world he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life I.”

I remembered hearing stories about Jesus at AWANA clubs, in between playing “steal the bacon” and memorizing Bible verses. Gloria, one of the leaders, beamed when she talked about Jesus, just like Lois was doing.

Sitting in the basement, Lois explained, verse by verse, what the Bible said. She and her husband, Don, had been missionaries in Paraguay. Now they were missionaries to young people like me.

God was working in my heart. Everything came together that night.

I came to realize I had spent my whole life doing things my way. I learned all of us are born sinners. God was perfect and if I hoped to go to heaven, well, I couldn't get there with my sins. Something had to be done.

I had thought if I was just good enough, I could get there. But that was still my idea, my way. Lois shared a verse.

Isaiah 64:6 “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”

That verse bothered me. It bothered me because I was trusting in my righteousness. What she said sounded too easy. Then she told me,

“It's a gift. If you pay for it, it's no longer a gift.”

So, all the time I was working toward heaven, I was ignoring what had already been done for me. I was saying what Jesus did was good, just not enough. I was trying to add to it.

In the Old Testament, God told the people to sacrifice a lamb for their sins. And when the death angel passed over their houses, whoever had put blood on the doorpost would be safe.

In John 1:29, John the Baptist was baptizing the people who had repented. I learned repentance means turning from the life you are living. When John saw his cousin Jesus approaching, he called out,

“Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.”

Jesus is our lamb. When we trust in what he did, our sins are washed away. God required perfect blood for sins.

Jesus lived a perfect life so he could shed perfect blood. Just what God required.

I remembered a song we used to sing in Sunday School by J. Wilbur Chapman. The chorus was:

*“Living he loved me,
dying he saved me,
buried he carried
my sins far away.
Rising he justified,
freely forever,
Some day he’s coming;
Oh glorious day.”*

It all came together. It made sense.

So on that night, September 12, 1971, I trusted in Christ.

I believed his blood was shed for my sins. And if I were the only person on earth, he still would have died for me.

Riding home in Bill's old Volkswagen, I felt peace. It was something I could be sure of, not something I hoped to achieve. When Jesus said, "It is finished," he was talking about the payment for sins.

While the rain drizzled down the window I saw it clearly.

I was totally forgiven. Not just some of my sins, but all of them. Gone, washed away.

Like the germs on a little boys hands.

2. Love is Personal

It was my birthday. At the front door stood my two precious grandsons.

One held an armful of games we would play at my party that night.

The other, who was three, wore a camouflage bandana on his head, like a motorcycle rider. He handed me fresh flowers and stated, "It's your birthday."

Holding those lovely flowers I smiled.

I remember another time someone gave me flowers.

I used to work for National Tea Company,
a grocery chain from years ago.

While waiting on a customer, I noticed the
cashier next to me oohing and aahing. Her
customer had just brought her a beautiful
bouquet of flowers as a thank you.

“Look at these!” she called, “aren’t they
beautiful?”

I smiled, nodding in agreement, but added,

**“They are pretty, but my favorites are
Lilies of the Valley.”**

I liked everything about those little bells as I called them. The faint fragrance, the miniature details. Even the fact they were only available for a short period of time in May. Yes, I loved Lilies of the Valley.

After the customer left, it was business as usual—my friend with the flowers by her register and flowerless me.

Less than ten minutes later, another customer walked up to me and stopped.

As she came closer I could see she held something in her hands.

“These are for you,” she said. That was it, nothing more.

She didn't say who the flowers were from, nor why she was giving them to me.

And there in her hands were a few stems of my favorite flower. Now, I could understand it if this was the same woman who had visited my associate, but I had never seen this woman before.

"Thank you," I whispered, tucking them into my name tag so I could enjoy their fragrance right then.

The remaining time at work somehow sweetened just like the air around my little flowers. I wore my smile the rest of the day as easily as the lilies. I felt cared for, special.

I even entertained the idea that my messenger was an angel.

When I got home I carefully put my miniature bouquet in a tiny cup to let it drink a bit of water as I admired them. And even when the flowers wilted, I tucked them in a bottom drawer for years.

I have no doubt it was God who sent me those flowers, for I believe God cares about his children, even in the minutia of life.

Through that gift, he expressed his love for me, for no particular reason, just because I'm his.

And how did that day affect my relationship with God? It confirmed how personal God is. You see, I believe God loves me and that I'm special in his eyes. I also believe I was given that gift so I could hold onto that memory for years to come, when I would need a reminder.

It's been over 40 years since I received that miniature bouquet. But the memory is so clear it could have been yesterday. And whenever I see Lilies of the Valley I remember that special day long ago—when I received my little bells.

I'm so glad God is a God of details, who cares about us enough to let us know.

He cares for us as we go from our day to day. And every now and then he surprises us. It can be a beautiful sunset or the first time we see a little hummingbird.

For me, it was getting flowers.



Little Bells

*The morning air was quiet
without a single sound
when something gently beckoned me
until I turned around.
I heard a sound so delicate;
a tender melody,
and saw your orchestra of bells,
all ringing just for me.*

3. Love Forgives

“Okay boys, you may get up now from time-out. But first, don’t you have something to say to each other?”

“I’m sorry I hit you,” my youngest grandson said to his brother.

“I forgive you. I’m sorry I pushed you.”

“I forgive you.”

With that they hugged each other and ran off to play.

If only we could forgive that easily when we’re hurt.

It had been years since I last saw my father.
He was just too hard on me.

Then I got a call from my sister, Peggy.

“Anne, it’s Dad. He has cancer. You’ve got to come see him.”

“No,” I answered quickly. “I won’t see him.”

But Peggy knew me well. She knew how to get through to me.

“Anne, you already regret not going to Mom when she called you that night. Don’t do it again.”

She was right. I had spent years feeling guilty. The night before my mom died my brother told me she called me. I didn't believe him so I didn't go to her, never imagining it would be the last time I would ever hear her voice.

The day my father found out, a coldness washed over his face. Pointing his finger at me he said,

“It's **your** fault your mother is dead.” At 16, and grief stricken for my mom, I believed him.

I wore guilt like an ill-fitted jacket.

Shortly after that day, I moved out. It was easier not being around my accuser.

And now my sister wanted me to see him?
He created his life. He's the one who
pushed us out, one at a time creating his
lonely world. That wasn't my doing.

**And yet, my gut told me she was right. I
hated my gut right then.**

"Okay," I answered crying. "I'll come."

Walking down the hallway at Veteran's
Hospital, the next day, thoughts bombard-
ed my mind,

*What would I see when I got to his room?
What would I say?*

Walking into his room, he exclaimed,

"Annie you came! But why do you look so
mad?"

*Was he serious? How could I not be mad?
Carrying guilt for something I never did.*

Who could take that?

The words burst out of my mouth,

“It wasn’t my fault she died.”

There, I said it.

I could barely look at him. This one who used to grab his belt, taking after us. This one who merely existed for his own needs and demands.

Why did I even come?

And then I heard it. Softly spoken, but I heard it just the same. “I know,” my dad said.

He knew?

He knew and kept it to himself?

I wanted to storm out of there. To hurt him like he had hurt me for so many years.

But, that’s not what happened. Instead, I stayed. As I looked at him, he said something I had never heard before.

“I’m sorry. Sorry I wasn’t a good father to you.”

Tears slid down my face. They slid into my heart softening the years of bitterness and resentment.

I heard myself say, “You did the best you could.”

I don’t know who was more surprised. Bending down, I kissed my dad on the cheek. I knew I was saying goodbye.

That was our last conversation. The next day when I saw him, he couldn’t see me.

That was the day I lost the dad I never had.

But I was free. God had empowered me to forgive my dad. I didn’t have the ability myself. The same God who forgave me, enabled me to forgive my dad.

That’s how God is.

4. Love Listens

“Gwamma, I don’t think I’ll find my Dynoco car, ever again,” my youngest grandson told me. It nearly broke her heart.

“Sweetheart, we need to pray,” I reminded him.

After I prayed, I looked once more and saw a car turned upside down in the box. Could it be? Was it Dynoco?

I could hardly contain myself, “Look! Look what Grandma found?”

His little face lit up. “Oh Gwamma, my Dynoco was disappeared, and God disappeared it back!”

Sometimes God even answers prayers we don’t verbalize.

I knew God loved me. Yet, at times I felt unloved.

Like when I thought about my miscarriage.
How could God have allowed me to lose this baby?

I continued to process my loss while we lived in Germany. We attended the Hospitality House, an outreach for soldiers and their families. Al and Jeanie were the missionaries there, so supportive and caring.

In our Sunday school class, Al talked about an upcoming trip they were sponsoring to Israel. How it would be the trip of a lifetime.

Going to Israel would be a dream come true.

But I knew we didn't have money to do it.

Still, I asked my husband, Mike, what he thought.

“You know we don’t have extra money,” he said.

Yes, I knew. But when Al kept talking about the trip, part of me got stirred up inside. I really wanted to go on that trip of a lifetime.

In my heart I said to God, “If you love me, I want to go to Israel.”

I had a lot of nerve bringing it up because I was mad at God at the time. I resented him for my miscarriage.

A wall started forming around my heart.

With each disappointment the wall became thicker.

I even gave God the silent treatment. Outwardly I was cordial, but inside, my heart was becoming like stone.

I began believing lies the enemy suggested,

“God doesn’t care about you. If he cared, why did he take your mother, your father, your sister? And what about the baby you miscarried? How could God love you and take so much from you?”

I knew Satan’s whispers were lies, but sometimes lies feel true.

Once more I heard about the trip to Israel. Oh, how I wanted to go.

Then one day Mike surprised me by saying, “ I don’t know Anne, maybe we *could* trust God for the trip.”

Slowly we approached Al, “Al, we want to tell you something but we don’t want you to laugh.

“Alright,” he said smiling in an ‘Al’ kind of way.

“We would like to trust God for the trip to Israel.”

Al didn’t laugh but instead he prayed. He prayed if God wanted us to go to Israel that God would provide for us.

Walking out of Al’s office we saw Pete, one of the soldiers we knew.

“What’s going on guys?” Pete asked.

Sheepishly we shared, “We want to trust God for the trip to Israel.”

Pete reached into his pocket for his check-book.

He immediately wrote out a check for the deposit of \$150.00.

“I believe God wants me to give this to you,” he smiled.

We stood there speechless while I felt something stir my hard heart.

With our deposit paid we started hoping.
Would God provide for our trip to Israel?

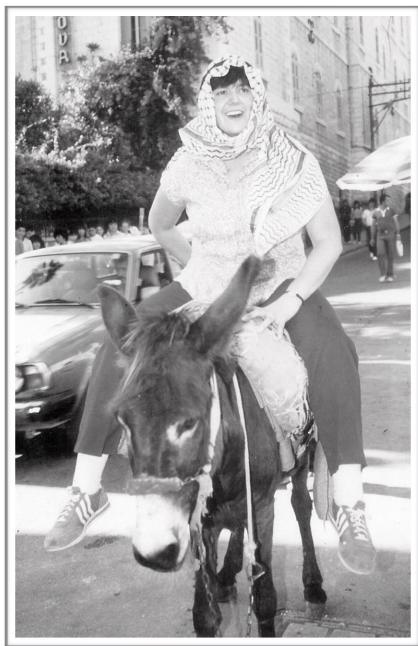
The next day Al announced a challenge to the class.

“Whoever can memorize the first chapter of James and the whole book of I John and recite it with less than two errors will have half their trip paid for.”

I decided to go for it. I worked on it for hours, days. And I did it! Half our trip was taken care of! All that remained was a balance of \$450.00.

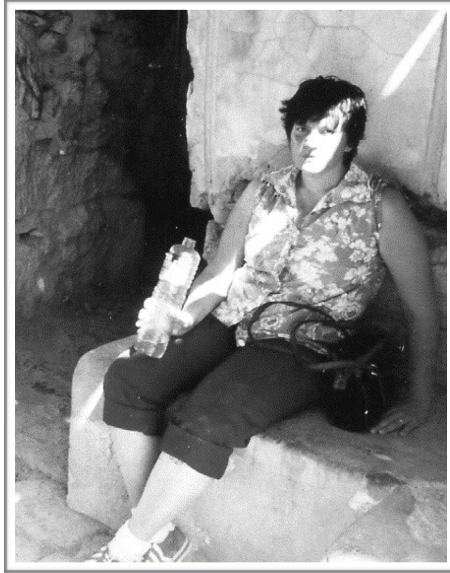
Another soldier offered to loan us the money, but after praying we didn't feel we were to incur debt.

If God wanted us to go, we believed he would provide.



The trip was unbelievable. We floated in the Dead Sea. We waded in the Jordan. We shared communion outside the garden tomb.

We prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. And I rode a donkey in Bethlehem, like Mary.



I actually climbed Masada! Parched, I reached the top, only to find Mike had given my water bottle to Al.

I couldn't believe God gave me my heart's desire. Does God answer prayers based on who we are? No.

God answers prayer. Because he loves us like a father. Even when we're mad.

Then we received a check from the army. They had overcharged us in our move overseas. The amount of overage was exactly \$450.00, the amount we needed!

I thought it was clear the money we received was for our trip. Mike felt otherwise. So we went to talk to Al.

After explaining everything Al said what he usually said, “Let’s pray.”

“You don’t understand,” Mike interjected, “we still have other bills; we **can’t** use that money for the trip.”

Al said once more, “Let’s pray.”

Once again we entered Al's office to bring this before God. Walking out to join the others, another friend approached us.

"What's going on?" Chuck asked.

"We're still believing God for our trip," Mike answered.

Chuck opened his wallet, taking out \$450.00 in cash.

"I just got my taxes back and I believe God wants me to give this to you."

We hugged Chuck screaming, "We're going to Israel!"

5. Love Protects

A woman asked her grandson,

“Who is the boss at your house?”

“Dad is the boss,” he said without hesitation,” but then he added, “but Mom’s in charge.”

I remember when I thought I was in charge of my life. God had to show me otherwise.

It would be a painful lesson; one I would not soon forget.

I ran to get the phone. It was my son Nathan's youth pastor,

"Hi Anne, this is Kyle." There was no idle chit-chat. He quickly said, "can you tell me if Nathan is around?"

"No, he's not." I said. "Kyle, is something wrong?"

There was a pause.

"I have reason to believe Nathan is going to hurt himself."

My stomach tied in a big knot.

But instead of my motherly instincts kicking in, I'm ashamed to admit my thoughts went somewhere else.

*How could this happen and I not know?
How could something like this be going on
in **my** household and I not have a clue?*

**God showed me I was not in control;
God was.**

The hours dragged on when I received another call. My friend JoHannah and her daughter had found Nathan. He had been walking around in a park. thankfully, he was okay. I found out later he had contemplated taking his life.

He further shared while he was in that dark place, God started giving him music.

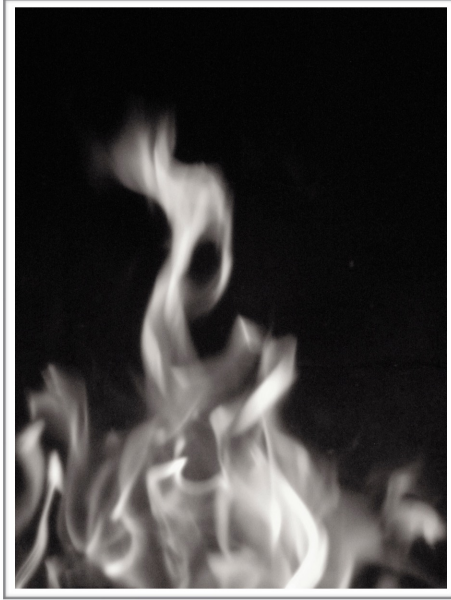
Today, Nathan is a worship leader with a heart for those who struggle. He leads a band called, “Hello Industry,” which ministers to young people who are hurting.
www.helloindustry.com

God showed me a valuable lesson that day. We think so differently than God. Our minds are finite; his mind is infinite. I had acted as if God and I were on the same level.

At times, I've questioned God like the patriarch Job did in the Bible. I've acted like I've always been around.

How could I dare speak to God with such arrogance? God showed me —it was pride, sinful pride.

The longer I've known the Lord, the more I learn about his unfathomable ways. He showed me he is God, not me. And he gave me this poem.



You Are God

*A lump of clay am I before you,
frowning at your forming fingers,
Whining at each little whittle,
every single step.
In your time my form is finished,
still, I keep my comments coming,
Disappointed in your details,
questioning your work.*

*Then it's time to feel the furnace
and my indignation heightens,
Do you know how hot the heat is?
Have you felt the fire?
Yet, you still continue working,
unaffected by my screaming,
wanting only my completion,
on and on you work.*

*Finished now, I sit before you,
glazed and shining your reflection,
In this process to completion,
lessons I have learned.
Each procedure I would question,
armed with arrogance astounding,
Till at last I see so clearly,*

You are God, not me.

6. Love Stays

I read my grandson the book, *Feelings*, by Todd Parr.

“Sometimes I feel like holding someone’s hand.”

I asked my grandson, “Do you ever want to hold someone’s hand?”

“Yes,” he said, “sometimes I want to hold mom’s hand.”

I remembered a time I wanted someone to hold my hand.

In 1982, my sister, Peggy disappeared, never to be seen again. I had many questions; questions that never got answered.

Her missing person case was changed to a possible homicide case.

Eight years ago, I sat in her trial where I was to testify. I would be identifying her husband, the suspect, by pointing him out. I didn't want to even look in his direction.

Led to a quiet room to wait my turn, I was thankful to be alone.

While my flesh was scared to death, my spirit reached out to God and I began softly singing.

My body might have been in that waiting room, but I saw myself in God's throne room, sitting on his lap, singing to him. When my turn came, God took me by the hand and went in with me.

And when I pointed across that courtroom, and identified her little boys in photographs of long ago, God steadied my shaking hands.

All of us experience hard times. Maybe you are sitting by a loved one's bedside, watching as cancer strips him of his healthy cells.

When we are overwhelmed we have to trust in what is true, instead of how we feel.

My Father's Hand

*I do not understand my life
it's difficult for me,
some questions
have no answers
at least that I can see
and yet, with every
year I've grown,
there is a truth
that God makes known
I do not have
to understand,
but simply hold
my Father's hand.*

Sometimes when trials come into our lives
we scratch our finite heads, look up and
ask, “why?”

Our questions are often met with deafening
silence. God wants us to trust him. To look
past the raging waves and howling winds
and focus on him.

**We may not know what is around the
corner, but we do know God will be
there.**

And when we’re scared we can reach out;
God will hold our hand.

7. Love Lavishes

“Grandma, Mom said we can pick one of our candies for each day,” her grandson said.

“Which one would you like today?”

Looking at the huge pile he said, “I want the Milky Way.

His little brother added, “ I want Dots.”

Minutes later she overheard their conversation. “You know you can have more than one Dot. Those five Dots are all yours.”

“Gwamma, can I have more?” he says.

“Yes, you may have all of them.”

Wow,” he said smiling big.

Sometimes we’re surprised at God’s abundance.

It's my turn. I'm handed this baby who has
my son's eyes. Joy trickles down my face.

My arms feel usable again, having missed
the perfect weight of an infant. I feel need-
ed.

Maybe I can move toward happiness.

My grandson gives me hope. He smiles
and coos. I'm in love again. Holding him
in my arms, I feel rejuvenated.

My motherly instincts awake. I get lost in
his big brown eyes.

I've loved being called, "Mom," I won't deny it. Thinking of when my grandchild will call me "Grandma," melts my heart, warms my toes.

I'm privileged to be a Mom to two. I revisit joy. I am tasting winsome again. Watching curiosity open it's eyes.

Children accentuate details. The small ant I would have missed.

Wondering where birds go when it's dark.

Do they every fall off branches while they sleep?

I rest my weathered eyes, looking through
his eyes instead. Everything becomes clear.

**The fog of headache lifts as I taste life
instead of the death of loved ones.**

I relish every wobbly step. I walk behind
him, with him. His chubby fingers take my
hand. We create memories I can enjoy later.
Smiling, I know this will last.

My first grandson turned two. I laugh
watching him open his birthday gifts. This
is even better than last year. His mom
holds up a little shirt with embroidered
words,

“Big Brother.”

“I love you all the way to the moon and back,” I tell my grandson.

“Grandma, I love you up to the sky and back down to the basement.”

I catch my breath realizing I just heard what love sounds like.

And I wonder how it will feel in April when the flowers bloom and once again I’m handed a new little one to love.

Yes. God gives abundantly. That’s what love does.

Conclusion

You know, there isn't a conclusion. It's more of a pause. Because like you, I'm still breathing in and out every day. And I'm still learning.

There are many people who don't realize what real love is. That it's available. God loves you and wants you to know it.

1 Corinthians 13: 4-8 says,

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

Only God could love us like this because his love is real.

About the Author



Anne Peterson is a speaker, poet, and author of 42 published Bible Studies with Christianity Today/Today's Christian Woman, as well as over 30 articles. Her poetry is sold in stores throughout the U.S. and in 23 countries.

Anne is also the author of her memoir, *Broken: A Story of Abuse and Survival*, a poetry grief book, *Droplets*, children's books: *Emma's Wish*, *The Crooked House*, *Lulu's Lunch* and *Sonny Follows His Heart*, an eerie poetry book, *Chills*, and *Make Believe volume one*, and *Make Believe volume two*.

For more information about Anne you can visit the following:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/annepetersonwrites>

website: www.annepeterson.com

twitter: [@annepeterson](https://twitter.com/annepeterson)