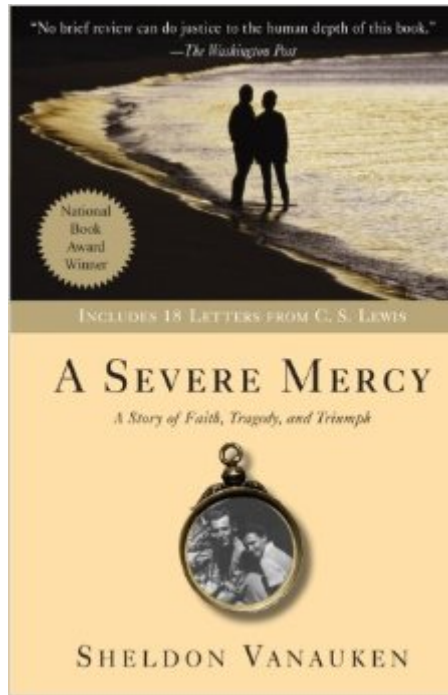


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# A Severe Mercy



## Synopsis

Beloved, profoundly moving account of the author's marriage, the couple's search for faith and friendship with C. S. Lewis, and a spiritual strength that sustained Vanauken after his wife's untimely death.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (239 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #6,780 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #12 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Ministry & Evangelism > Evangelism](#) #34 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Worship & Devotion > Inspirational](#) #52 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Religious](#)

## Customer Reviews

A Severe Mercy is a masterfully crafted autobiography and the story of an intensely deep love relationship, a profound introspective on their path to finding God, and the ultimate bereavement the author experiences as his thirty-something wife dies of a terminal illness. Along the way, their paths cross with C.S. Lewis; personal correspondence with him peppers the book, as does a collection of superb poems written by Vanauken. It explores complex theological, philosophical and aesthetic issues with deep insight and profoundly sharp perspective. I can't recommend it highly enough, it's truly one of the best books I've ever read - a work of art which crosses many dimensions. Practically speaking, A Severe Mercy explores a number of crucial life issues with breathtaking clarity. First, the second chapter, "The Shining Barrier" distills more insight into the true workings of a wonderful marriage relationship than a dozen garden-variety relationship books from the self-help section of a bookstore. Anyone who wants to understand why their romance has cooled off after five or ten or twenty years of marriage (including myself) could use this chapter alone as a manual for re-kindling the fire. Secondly, it explores the nature of a difficult spiritual journey in a most articulate way - the emotional, philosophical, theological and personal implications of the claims of Jesus Christ. This

book is not in any way a Bible-thumping promo for Christianity; rather it examines the claims of Christ and their implications from logical, historical, aesthetic and personal viewpoints -- in a way that no thinking person can easily dismiss. I gave this book to friends of mine, a highly educated married professional couple, before they went on a camping trip. They were struggling mightily to reconcile Christianity with their modern worldview and the book was instrumental in helping them accomplish a breakthrough. Third, it delves into the difficult interior world of a person who is bereft of the love of his life and who must feel the sorrow and loss and yet go on. *A Severe Mercy* plumbs the depths of all of these issues via beautiful prose, expertly crafted perspective, and provocative poetry. Highly recommended.

I have loved this book over the years for all the reasons stated in the other reviews printed here and purchased it again here recently as a gift. You, too, will love the read. However, my comments are regarding the edition that is being offered here. The book quality from this publisher is exceedingly poor and not worth buying. Both the paper and the print are of the cheapest quality and are not worthy of a book of this excellence. Get the book, but get it from a better publisher.

After putting it off for several years, I finally read *A Severe Mercy*, between Maunday Thursday and Easter Sunday, 1999. With Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection as the background, along with my wife's yearning to leave our Lutheran exile and join the Roman Catholic Church, I cried my way through the book, simply unable to restrain tears of hurt, joy, compassion, sorrow, and very strong empathy. These tears were also shed in the context of Little Lost Marion, Vanauken's story of finding the child Davy had at age 14, and which she put up for adoption, not aborting. Sheldon and Davy never had children, a pre-Christian decision a Christian Vanauken came to regret. Then it hit me. The power of the book doesn't lie primarily in the story of grief and lost love, as poignant and beautiful as it is. Rather, if we stop with Sheldon and Davy's love for each other, we will miss Vanauken's major point: Davy's death as God's "severe mercy" to keep Sheldon in God's love. Davy's death allowed God to destroy the "shining barrier" of their love, kill that idol, and reclaim Vanauken for himself. Mercy, indeed, if you can handle it, and Vanauken, in God's grace did. Perfect Lenten and Holy Week reading! But also a perfect book to help Christians understand the lengths to which God will go to keep his children and to see that in the great hurts and disappointments of life, God's severe mercy is frequently at work.

After several readings of this book over the past few years, I can conclude without any hesitation

that it is the most moving and unforgettable memoir I've ever read. It is relevant to note that all 29 of the other ... reviewers (at the time of my own writing) rate it a solid 5 stars... it really deserves a sixth. Not only for its amazing true content, but for the beautiful way in which the author lays it all out. This book will literally captivate your imagination, sweep you away, and tug you towards a deeper understanding of the depths of "inloveness" (a Vanauken term) possible in God-ordained marriage. Sheldon and Jean Vanauken were living the dream of togetherness that most people only... well, DREAM about... until they came face to face with the fact that perhaps "perpetual springtime is not allowed." Those words were from their personal friend, the Oxford don C.S. Lewis and addressed to Sheldon as he tried to make sense of his overwhelming grief. This is the story of a profound love between two people... a love that has its genesis, consummation, and terminus in heavenly places. If your eyes are dry all the way through this book... well, never mind... they won't be.

What a beautifully engrossing book. I had known about the kind of book *A Severe Mercy* was for some years, and had (unconsciously) been avoiding it, for I knew it was a book about, and for, grieving. It is also a story about a sweet, adventurous, wide-awake marriage. But most of all, it is a message to the reader about the most pure and complete love of all, the love of God for his creation. One should read this book only if one is prepared (Christian or not) to be confronted with the awesome (and undeniable) truth of God's existence and his relentlessly loving pursuit of his children.

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