

Walking with Herb: A Spiritual Golfing Journey to the Masters

Joe S. Bullock

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This novel's theme is encouraging, inviting, and compelling: God calls ordinary people to fulfill his purpose in ways they could never imagine.

Walking with Herb: A Spiritual Golfing Journey to the Masters, by Joe S. Bullock, is the story of a typical middle-aged man's atypical encounter with God.

The protagonist is Joe Goodman, a man approaching retirement age, who lives a predictable, happy life. He works at a bank; he loves golf and his family. He is, as his last name suggests, a good man. The relatability of his life is the book's hook: middle-aged men who've been lulled into complacency by years of normal, nice-enough existence will see themselves in Joe. But Joe is challenged when a message from God arrives on Joe's computer. God calls Joe, an average-performing hobbyist golfer, to play the Masters next year, "and if your faith is strong enough, you are going to win," says God. From there, the story follows Joe as he learns more about and ultimately fulfills God's seemingly far-fetched plan for his life.

The titular Herb is a messenger from God who functions as Joe's caddy. Like every golf story, the relationship between golfer and caddy is central. In this case, Herb's wisdom benefits not only Joe's golf game but also his relationship with God, and the way he fulfills God's purpose for his life.

Chapter 1 leads with a few pages of backstory that are relatable but make the pace seem a bit slow. Once the action begins, the story has an even, moderate pace. Joe's befuddlement with the sudden turn of events in his life, expressed in his stereotypical yet charming older man voice ("Oh crud ... I'll have to call the young nerds from IT to fix this darn thing"), keep the narrative moving.

The plot has a lightness and humor about spiritual matters: God sends e-mail, describes Joe as "painfully average," and makes fun of his hair. But Bullock's message has depth. Bullock wants everyone who's "painfully average" to awaken to God's calling, the calling that many spend years silencing. The book's themes speak to the dull boredom so many people face. While the novel is not strictly religious, it presumes its audience has familiarity with and a positive disposition to the idea of God.

The title and genre listing (body/mind/spirit) suggest that the book is nonfiction, but the back cover copy and the words "a novel" on the cover remedy any misperception. *Walking with Herb* is a light story that delves into deep truths about life.

MELISSA WUSKE (July 23, 2015)

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