

# Traveling Mercies

by Anne Lamott

## *Discussion Guide*

*Traveling Mercies*, by Anne Lamott (Anchor Books, copyright c1999), is the story of Anne Lamott's coming to faith as told through a series of essays about her life experiences, her relationships with others, and her friendship with God. The book details her life with an abundance of wit and wisdom. She shares not only her faith, but also the joys and struggles of life that are easy to identify with. Her warmth and passion provide a moving experience that touches both the heart and the funny bone. Anne Lamott takes you on a journey you will both remember and enjoy.

*Permission is granted to reproduce this discussion guide.*

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### Overture

#### **Lilly Pads**

*This section details the beginning of her life and her early thoughts about faith.*

1. Share why you have selected this book to read and what you hope to gain from it.
2. Discuss what you have in common with Lamott. Share the origins of your faith.
3. How were you and your faith influenced by family members and your friends?

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### Chapter 1

#### **Mountain, Valley, Sky**

*This chapter contains three essays relating to experiences during Anne's travels.*

#### **Knocking On Heaven's Door**

1. Share a memorable trip that took some unexpected twists.
2. How do you think of God differently when you are in peril as compared to when you are safe and secure?

3. What did you learn about miracles from her story?

### **Ladders**

4. Share a time of loss in your life. What feelings are associated with loss?
5. What story or observation in Ladders touched you and why?
6. Discuss lessons on grief and recovery that are found in Ladders.

### **Mountain Birthday**

7. Discuss the pros and cons that Anne debated on whether to let Sam paraglide.
8. Share any new insights about making decisions and asking God for help.
9. Compare Anne's favorite prayers to your favorite prayers.

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## Chapter 2

### **Church, People, Steeple**

*This chapter contains three essays relating to faith inside and outside of church.*

#### **Ashes**

1. Discuss what made this Ash Wednesday memorable for Anne.
2. Share what Ash Wednesday means to you. How do you observe it?
3. Why do you think Anne wrote about this experience? What point(s) did she want to make?

#### **Why I Make Sam Go To Church**

4. Discuss the reasons why Anne wants Sam to attend church.
5. Why do children and adults often resist attending church services?
6. Discuss the ways that Anne and Sam are ministered to at their church.

#### **Traveling Mercies**

7. Explain the meaning of "traveling mercies." Why is it the title of this book and essay?
8. How do you cope with brokenness? Give an example from your life experience.
9. Discuss how this story illustrates God's perfect timing.

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## Chapter 3

### **Tribe**

*This chapter contains three essays about the people and situations that God uses to touch our lives and change us.*

### **Fields**

1. What do you admire about Rick Fields?
2. Discuss some of the lessons you learn about life from sickness or from death of loved ones.
3. Name some insights or observations Anne gained from her visit to the beach.

### **Forgiveness**

4. Share a time you struggled with the issue of forgiveness.
5. What do you admire about Anne's struggle with forgiveness?
6. Is it always a struggle to forgive? Is it ever easy? Explain your thoughts.

### **Grace**

7. List some of the definitions and ingredients of grace as found in this essay.
8. How does God teach us about grace?
9. Discuss the relationship between grace and failure.

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## Chapter 4

### **Kids, Some Sick**

*This chapter contains three essays that look at adult faith when sick kids are concerned.*

### **Barn Raising**

1. List some practical ways that people helped Olivia and her family.
2. What kind of relationship does Anne have with God? How does it help her?
3. Where do you turn for shelter from the storms of life?

### **Tumbler's Dog**

4. How are you sometimes like Akela?
5. Share a time you sought to overcome a fear.
6. What lessons can we learn from animals?

### **Hearthcake**

7. What do you do, or where do you go, when you need to feel the all-embracing nature of God?
8. Why do you think Anne included the story of Elijah hiding in a cave?
9. What happens to your relationship with God when your child is seriously sick?

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## Chapter 5

### **Body and Soul**

*This chapter contains five essays of observations on the human body and eternal soul.*

### **Gypsies**

1. What did Anne realize by watching the movie, *Gypsies*?
2. List and discuss thoughts and feelings associated with middle age.
3. Why are many people so caught up with how they look? How does God see us?

### **The Mole**

4. Share a time when you were concerned about a health issue.
5. How did Anne enlist God and her faith to cope with her health problem?
6. Why do people worry? Is it good or bad? Any benefits to it? What are helpful ways to respond to worries?

### **Thirst**

7. What lessons did Anne learn about herself from her struggle with alcoholism?
8. List and discuss ways we often fool ourselves and why we fail to see the truth.

9. Discuss the wisdom of the last paragraph of Thirst.

### **Hunger**

10. What do you admire about how Anne battled her eating disorder?

11. Discuss how a person knows when to seek professional help.

12. How do you distinguish between healthy and non-healthy choices in life?

### **The Aunties**

13. Share a time when you experienced a breakthrough in your thinking or how you thought about yourself.

14. List and discuss the truths about personal appearance as contained in this essay.

15. Discuss Anne's statement: You tend to your spirit through the body.

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## Chapter 6

### **Fambly**

*This chapter contains four essays about family relationships and how others relate to us.*

#### **Mom**

1. Discuss the statement: Families are definitely the training ground for forgiveness.

2. Discuss the challenges of caring for and supporting an aging parent.

3. How has your viewpoint and understanding of your mother changed over the years?

#### **Dad**

4. Discuss how your relationship with your father affects your relationship with other men.

5. Create a portrait in words of Anne's father.

6. What touched you about Anne's memories of her father?

#### **Sister**

7. To what extent do you think people judge others by the style or length of their hair?

8. What did you find amusing about Anne's dreadlock story?

9. How do you feel when someone comments on your hair? Why is it important to have “good hair” or the right style?

### **Baby**

10. Why do you think Anne wrote this story? What points did she want to make?
11. According to Anne, how was God involved in what happened?
12. Share a time when God delivered a miracle, or an unexpected gift.

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## Chapter 7

### **Shore and Ground**

*This chapter contains three essays that convey spiritual truths about life’s challenges.*

#### **A Man Who Was Mean to His Dog**

1. Share a time you witnessed an ugly incident and how you responded.
2. List and discuss the insights Anne makes about God and God’s love.
3. Anne asks what Jesus would have done in this situation. How is this question a helpful guide to our actions? What limitations are there?

#### **Into Thin Mud**

4. Discuss the opening observation of where we look for salvation and where we actually find it.
5. Why was that August a hard month for Anne? How does it feel to be in her situation?
6. Share what you learned about finding solace.

#### **Altar**

7. What do you admire about Sam?
8. What was the purpose of the altar? What gave the altar importance and meaning?
9. Share what you gained from reading this book and the discussions.