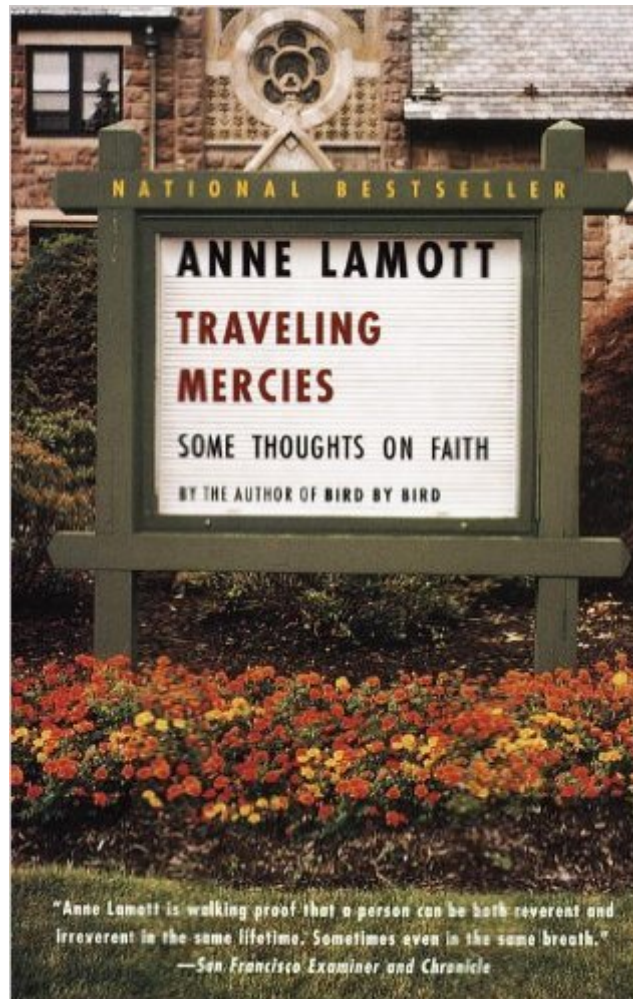


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# Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts On Faith



## Synopsis

Anne Lamott claims the two best prayers she knows are: "Help me, help me, help me" and "Thank you, thank you, thank you." She has a friend whose morning prayer each day is "Whatever," and whose evening prayer is "Oh, well." Anne thinks of Jesus as "Casper the friendly savior" and describes God as "one crafty mother." Despite--or because of--her irreverence, faith is a natural subject for Anne Lamott. Since *Operating Instructions* and *Bird by Bird*, her fans have been waiting for her to write the book that explained how she came to the big-hearted, grateful, generous faith that she so often alluded to in her two earlier nonfiction books. The people in Anne Lamott's real life are like beloved characters in a favorite series for her readers--her friend Pammy, her son, Sam, and the many funny and wise folks who attend her church are all familiar. And *Traveling Mercies* is a welcome return to those lives, as well as an introduction to new companions Lamott treats with the same candor, insight, and tenderness. Lamott's faith isn't about easy answers, which is part of what endears her to believers as well as nonbelievers. Against all odds, she came to believe in God and then, even more miraculously, in herself. As she puts it, "My coming to faith did not start with a leap but rather a series of staggers." At once tough, personal, affectionate, wise, and very funny, *Traveling Mercies* tells in exuberant detail how Anne Lamott learned to shine the light of faith on the darkest part of ordinary life, exposing surprising pockets of meaning and hope.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I had no idea what to expect in this, my first encounter with Anne Lamott. The wide assortment of reviews convinced me to purchase the book--plus, the idea of reverence paired with irreverence,

since we can all use a little humor to season the subjects that matter most...that therefore become so stinkin' divisive! Wow! When I'm not laughing at Anne's great writing and gritty insights, I'm pushing down that lump in my throat. Anne plants and waters the flowers of faith and grace, but pats down their seeds beneath the coarse dirt and smelly manure of life. I'm not trying to match her metaphors, I'm merely responding to the fresh light she's shone on my own recent experiences. This woman can write and, boy, does she have something to say. If she steps on your toes to get to the podium, so be it. Hear her out. She writes of a heartfelt belief in Jesus that I share. But she also drags out the skeletons that we born-again Christians are so afraid to let out. Ironical, isn't it, that those who follow Christ--the most amazing example of love and acceptance and forgiveness to the "unlovely"--are the very ones who insecurely point their fingers at those outside their box. I grew up in that box. I still love Jesus, still consider myself "born-again," but I, along with Anne Lamott, refuse to live in that box anymore. Jesus, speaking to the religious leaders of his day, called them "white-washed tombs full of dead man's bones." Anne, in her gracious, irreverent way, says the same. Mercy me! What a breath of fresh air!

If you're experiencing a lot of spiritual "static" as I am right now, this book will immediately make you feel better. It will assure you that you're not the only one to feel doubt and need and grief, and yet it will give you countless opportunities to release those emotions through laughter. I have highlighted much of the book so that I can reread the great ways that Anne Lamott captures these experiences. She talks about grieving over her late best friend, saying she was, "thinking of how much we lose, yet how much remains." Then she says, "I thought maybe I wouldn't feel so bad if I didn't have such big pieces of [her friend] still inside me, but then I thought, I want those pieces in me for the rest of my life, whatever it costs me." Lamott writes about trying hard to translate her spiritual beliefs into everyday treatment of others, and she's particularly funny when she writes about the mother of her son's friend. She berates the woman first for wearing bicycle shorts ("because she can"). Lamott says, "...she does not have an ounce of fat on her body. I completely hate that in a person. I consider it an act of aggression against the rest of us mothers who forgot to start working out after we had our kids." Lamott tries to be better, saying, "I tried to will myself into forgiving various people who had harmed me directly or indirectly over the years--four former Republican presidents, three relatives, two old boyfriends, and one teacher in a pear tree--it was "The Twelve Days of Christmas" meets "Taxi Driver." I loved this book. I didn't want it to end. It made me laugh. It made me think. These are qualities I seek in my friends and my books.

In "Travelling Mercies", Anne Lamott chronicles her journey of faith. From drug addiction, to alcoholism: through the deaths of her father and best friend, and the birth of her son, Ms. Lamott traces her spiritual journey in a series of moving, funny, and deeply personal anecdotes. One warning: this book is probably not for those seeking a traditionally-minded, conservative Christian memoir, as it is definitely not either traditional or conservative! For those whose faith is less structured, this book is an incredibly funny, searingly personal and deeply moving account of one woman's transformation through faith. Ms. Lamott possesses the rare gift of translating her faith into day-to-day experiences and sharing her innermost, most difficult or stressful thoughts in a very funny, realistic, human way. Other readers have mentioned the story of the woman in bicycle shorts (Ms. Lamott's "Enemy Lite."), which is truly hilarious. Other highlights included the "celebration" of Ash Wednesday, and her encounter with another Christian whose faith seemed to be quite a different order from her own. Ms. Lamott is also wonderful when she writes about children: whether about her own son or her friends' children. This would make a wonderful gift for those who are "teetering on the edge" of Christianity, wondering, can this faith, this tradition possibly ever mean anything to me? Through these stories, Anne Lamott illustrates the miracle that is her faith, and leaves the door open for anyone who wants to follow. A wonderful, inspiring and very funny book.

As a word of warning, this book is full of crass and offensive language and situations. You will not find someone pretending that everything is okay, but freely admitting the painful details of her life. Lamott has suffered through many trials in her past including early and frequent promiscuity and abortion, heavy drug use, financial problems, alcoholism, bulimia, and suicidal thoughts. Yet, because of this 'hold nothing back' mentality, the book is very real, funny and sometimes insightful. We see a woman grasping for faith and hope in the midst of a crazy life full of heartache. This book may help those who feel they are unacceptable to the church because of things they have done. Lamott reminds us that God's grace is for all people in all circumstances. It pushes us past the misunderstandings of Christians as people who have everything together. Here, we find a very non-typical 'Christian' woman, who may help reach others with the Good News that Christ died for us while we were still sinners. I would recommend this book to friends and others who have been turned off by traditional Christianity, hoping that it may provide a door for them to reconsider what this Jesus stuff is all about. Finally, the book serves as call for all of us in the church to live out the Gospel message through lives of love and service. Lamott says, "when I was at the end of my rope, the people at St. Andrew tied a knot in it for me and helped me hold on. The church had become my home" (100). I pray that her experience may describe all of our churches as we reach

out and welcome in all types of people, so that they may know their true home in the unconditional love of Christ.

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