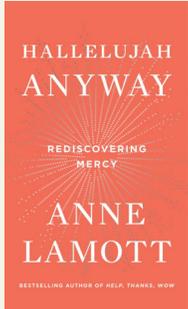


In Reading Groups

Book Discussion Guide from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

by Jeff Langford



Hallelujah Anyway

by Anne Lamott

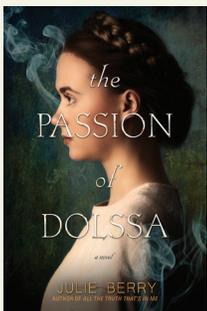
With her trademark humor and candor, Lamott explores the scriptural imperative to “love mercy,” reviewing both the difficulties and the life-changing rewards of obeying this mandate. Lamott’s honesty and humility, laced with wit and compassion, offer wisdom and hope for difficult times.

1. Lamott asks, “Where do I look for answers when I’m afraid, or confused, or numb?” How would you answer this question?
2. Lamott says, “My parents, teachers, and the culture I grew up in showed me a drawer in which to stuff my merciful nature, because mercy made me look vulnerable and foolish, and it made me less productive.” Do you agree that mercy is at odds with our culture’s focus on staying safe, looking good and being productive?
3. Lamott reveals that the title for the book comes from a gospel song. How have spiritual songs influenced your life?
4. Lamott says that “Kindness toward others and radical kindness to ourselves buy us a shot at a warm and generous heart, which is the greatest prize of all. Do you want this, or do you want to be right?” In your life, how important is being right?
5. Throughout the book, Lamott repeats the refrain, “Thank God I am in charge of next to nothing.” How does Lamott’s confessional writing style enhance this sentiment?
6. Reflecting on the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Lamott asks, “Will the older brother do the deep dive toward family and mental healing, breathe in all the joy and mercy he has seen, and go into the feast? Will you? Will I?” How would you answer?
7. Lamott says, “[Great friends] were the ground on which we found meaning and acceptance, a counterweight to our belief that deep down we were frauds, defective, or a total disappointment.” How have great friends helped you overcome self-doubt?
8. Lamott suggests that mercy consists mostly of “noticing, caring, accepting, helping, not running away.” How would you change this list? Would you add or remove anything?
9. Quoting Lewis Smedes, Lamott says: “To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.” Have you ever been a prisoner to an inability to forgive?
10. Lamott draws a parallel between the story of the Good Samaritan and her recovery from addiction: “Those of us who have gotten sober all began as the man in the ditch, shown mercy and welcome by sometimes strange people, with bolo ties or neck tattoos.” How can churches better demonstrate mercy and welcome for people “in the ditch?”
11. In her story about shopping at Zoologie, Lamott says, “God loves rock bottom.” Do you agree? How have you seen this idea revealed in real life?
12. “This is the greatest mercy I know, a loved one hearing and nodding even if over the phone.” How have you experienced listening as a mercy?

13. Lamott uses an alarming image for mercy: “Polite inclusion is the gateway drug to mercy.” Is this a helpful way to explain how we can become more merciful?
14. Lamott suggests that, in our pursuit of mercy and goodness, “Mother Nature is the main problem. Mother Nature runs on the principle that we all just get killed.” Do you agree that your instinct for survival shapes how you treat others?
15. Reflecting on Jesus’ actions in the Lazarus story, Lamott believes, “Mercy means I don’t run away from this and go shopping, just because you and your smelly family disappoint me. I stay.” How has a commitment to “stay” in spite of difficulties affected your important relationships?
16. “God doesn’t give us answers. God gives us grace and mercy. God gives us Her own self. Left to my own devices, I would prefer answers.” Do you think the church does a good job of seeking God rather than seeking answers?
17. Lamott quotes a saying from the mystics: As above, so below, as within, so without, as the universe, so the soul.” How does this idea of connectedness impact your view of mercy?
18. “Pope Francis says the name of God is mercy. Our name was mercy, too, until we put it away and became more productive, more admired and less vulnerable.” Where do opportunities exist for mercy to grow in your life, perhaps at the expense of productivity, admiration or invulnerability?
19. Lamott describes the pre-Christian Paul as “a maker of grief and confusion for himself and others, trying to compensate for his emptiness with good works and domination, always trying harder.” Do you see Paul this way?
20. When Lamott tries to back out of her baptism, her pastor intervenes: “He said I didn’t have to get it together before I could be included and, in fact, couldn’t get it together without experiencing inclusion. So Loretta picked me up, and I got baptized.” What do you think of the pastor’s words? Reflect on Loretta’s impact on Lamott’s life.
21. Reflecting on the story of the woman at the well, Lamott says, “Jesus offered himself as a loving listener, a no-judging ear. He invited her to come clean.” How can Christians do a better job of offering a “no-judging ear” to struggling people?
22. “Forgiveness and mercy mean that, bit by bit, you begin to outshine the resentment. You open the drawer that was shut and you take out the precious treasures that you hid there so long ago and, with them, the person who marvels at tadpoles who pulls for people to come clean and then have a second chance, who aches and intervenes for those being bullied, forgives the evil brothers and the unforgivable you.” Reflect on ways forgiveness and mercy have allowed you to become more authentic.

Jeff Langford is coordinator of CBF Heartland and serves as editor of CBF’s missional formation curriculum.

NEXT MONTH



The Passion of Dolssa

by Julie Berry

(Young Adult) Set in 13th century Provence, Berry draws from meticulous historical research to offer the portrait of a young matchmaker and a condemned heretic who feels called by God to heal the sick. Love, faith, violence, and power intertwine as the teenage girls struggle to survive against insurmountable odds.