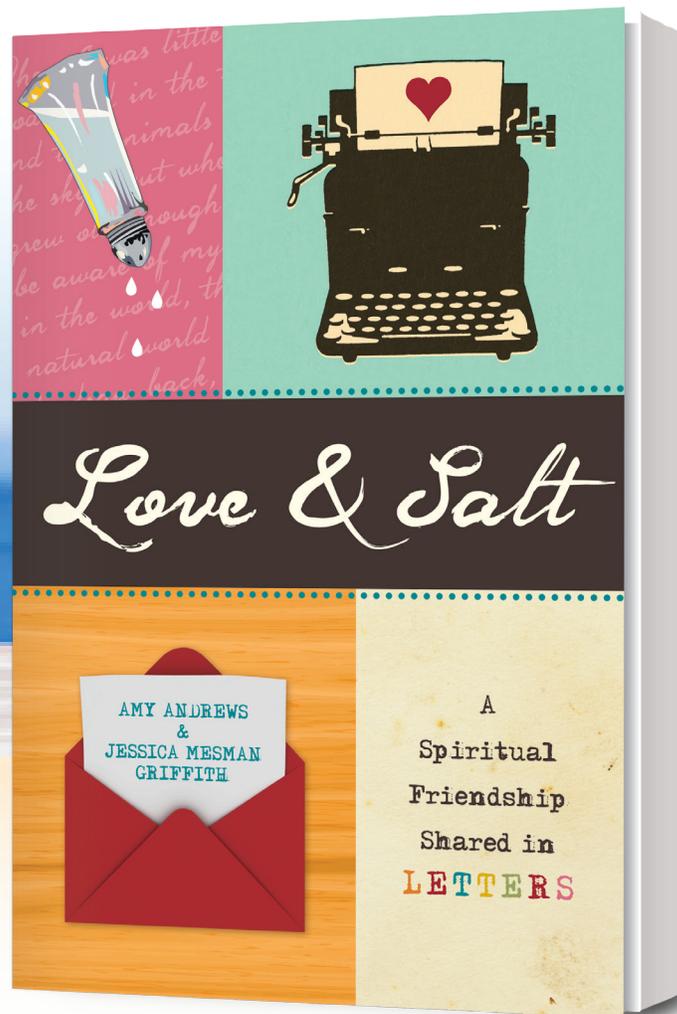


Discussion Guide

Summer Reading for the Soul



Week One: Conversion

1. Amy struggles with the simple and moving visions Julian of Norwich had of God's power, and desires the opposite: a grand vision. What about the ordinary in your life do you find frustrating or absent of God's grandeur?
2. Jess and Amy reflect on their journey of faith and how over the years their prayer lives have changed. Describe your prayer life and view of God when you were a child. How is your prayer life and view of God different now?
3. What stories or experiences of pain, sorrow, or doubt have shown you God?
4. How does the notion of working towards "conformity with God's will," make you feel (79)? What does practicing this look like in your own daily life?
5. Easter is a time to live the Resurrection, not the suffering of the Passion. Jess finds the Passion an easier way of life (106). Which do you find easier? How do you live now?

Week Two: New Life

1. Amy finds God “indistinguishable from the rattle” within her own mind. Where do you seek God? Where do you find God? If they are not the same place, why do you think that is the case?
2. Who is the one who holds the faith for you when you seek it? For whom do you feel you are the holder of faith?
3. Mr. Toad is seeking something different and other from his everyday life (141). What do you hope to gain most from your faith?
4. Name a burden you wish to bring to God. Have you brought it already? If so, describe the change in your spirit during the time since. If not, what holds you back?
5. What aspects of your daily life, the mundane or ordinary, are sacramental for you? Has there been a time when these have risen into visions like those Amy describes from *Gilead* (193)?

Week Three: Loss

1. Describe a time when you felt you needed courage to love: either to fall into or remain in it. Were there particular people or prayers that helped? Did you feel God was present or absent? Why?
2. When you feel pain, anxiety, or depression set in or approach, how do you respond or cope? Do you include God in this process? Why or why not?
3. What images or fantasies of perfection resulted in disappointment? How did you feel in that reality (pain, shame, loss, etc.)?
4. Who is/are the high friend(s) in your life like Amy and Jess are to each other? What are some of the graces of this relationship?
5. Amy sees her sense of self completely shift after the loss of Clare (250). What pivotal moments in your life have shifted your sense of self? Describe how this has changed over time if possible.

Week Four: Providence & Coda

1. How do you understand providence? Is it a struggle or relief to believe in providence? How do you envision the actions necessary to give in to providence?
2. Describe a time in your life, in the past or even right now, when you felt “apart from God” (274). What events, thoughts, emotions are tied to this experience? If you’ve moved closer to God, what actions occurred to get you to this point?
3. Jess writes to Amy about the importance of stories, such as *The Lord of the Rings* (299). What stories, fiction or non-fiction, have developed your faith as powerfully as God’s Word?
4. Jess often feels helpless accompanying Amy through her journey of pain. When have you tried to be supportive to someone and felt helpless? What other emotions and aspects of faith were tied to this feeling of helplessness?
5. What miracles have you experienced in your life? Take a moment to offer gratitude to God for each of these miracles.