

# Discussion Questions

*One Hundred  
Birds  
Taught Me  
to Fly*

## BIRDS

- Ashley Mae's "birds" appear in the form of people she encountered as a child, as a missionary, and in a variety of other circumstances. Who resonated with you?
- Did anyone from your own life come to mind?

## STRUCTURE

- When Ashley Mae was working on the book, she described its sections as being like different displays at an art exhibit—clusters on a theme. How did you make sense of the book's structure?
- How did the structure feel different to you than other spiritual memoirs or narratives you've read?
- Did it seem familiar, or did it make you think about your own spiritual story differently?
- Some of the book's movements are free-flowing lists rather than story narratives. ("Twelve times I prayed," p. 6; "Things I can believe better," p. 112; "Things I will reverence," p. 147; etc.) What might her approach to writing suggest about the nature of discussing spiritual things?

## RESONANCE

- In what ways do you feel similar to or different from Ashley Mae?
- Did you have a favorite piece? A least favorite piece?
- Ashley Mae is a white, middle-class, American Mormon in her thirties. How might her stories have differed for someone with a different background?
- Among other things, Ashley Mae is an artist and author. What are your avenues of exploration and self-expression, and do her experiences shed any new light on how you think of them?

## FAITH

- Did the book introduce you to new ways of thinking about your faith? Did it raise ideas you had already been working through for yourself?
- How does the book change the way you think about the role of religion (not just Mormonism) in general?
- There are several open-ended movements with ambiguous take-away messages, such as Ashley Mae's experience with the three-legged dog (pp. 155–156). What can be the benefit of telling such stories?

## COMMUNITY

- How can a religious community benefit from more open-ended story telling? Why might it also be difficult for people within a religious community to speak this way?
- In her foreword, Kristin Matthews says we should "envision how our different beliefs and practices... might fit together to make something bigger and better than ourselves alone" (p. xvii). What are some ways you might better integrate and share your ideas, thoughts, and stories in your own spiritual community?
- What do you do if your story does not fit the standard or is rejected by some people?
- How can a spiritual community benefit from a diversity of stories?



## WRITING

- Writing can be a powerful way to learn more about your personal faith. Write about something you've never before articulated about your faith. For example, write about a memory from your baptism, mission, school experience, a special sacrament meeting, a day spent with a friend or family members, but begin the story from a different place or angle than you've always told it. Maybe speak about your baptism in terms of an uncle who was not Mormon but who came to support you, or the neighbor who made your wedding cake as a gift to you, but you didn't like the way it looked.
- Try writing about your spiritual story by focusing on an emotion that isn't typically associated with faith. Sadness, anger, laughter, honesty, despair, and delight are a few examples of emotions we find in the scriptures but which perhaps we seldom notice. How do you see your story differently? What happens when you infuse your story with a wider range of emotions?
- How is your story different when it is written instead of spoken? In a Latter-day Saint context, people typically express their faith orally in testimony meetings in fairly formulaic ways. What is the value of writing out your thoughts, beliefs, memories, and stories rather than only speaking them?

## READING

If you enjoyed *One Hundred Birds Taught Me to Fly*, you might also be interested in these other books and resources:

- Annie Dillard, *Holy the Firm* (New York: Perennial, 1977)
- Lauren F. Winner, *Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2013)
- Brian Doyle, *Leaping: Revelations and Epiphanies* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2013)
- Annie Clark Tanner, *A Mormon Mother: An Autobiography of Annie Clark Tanner* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1983)
- Adam S. Miller, *Letters to a Young Mormon* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2014)
- Harold B. Lee Library's "Guide to Women's Manuscript Collections."  
Brigham Young University's library has collected many women's life stories and other materials. Collections include biographies, autobiographies, diaries, letters, papers, and other records by women, most of whom are Latter-day Saints. The online guide provides a short biographical sketch of each woman with an abstract describing the collection's content. It can be browsed by name or searched by name or topic. Entries are added on a regular basis.  
Go to <https://sites.lib.byu.edu/muw/womens/>.