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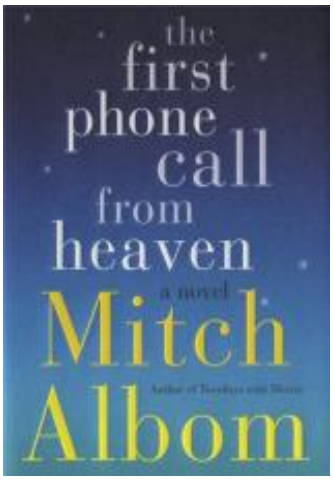
The First Phone Call from Heaven

by Mitch Albom



About the Book

THE FIRST PHONE CALL FROM HEAVEN tells the story of a small town on Lake Michigan that gets worldwide attention when its citizens start receiving phone calls from the afterlife. Is it the greatest miracle ever or a massive hoax? Sully Harding, a grief-stricken single father, is determined to find out. An allegory about the power of belief --- and a page-turner that will touch your soul --- Albom?s masterful storytelling has never been so moving and unexpected.

Readers of THE FIVE PEOPLE YOU MEET IN HEAVEN will recognize the warmth and emotion so redolent of Albom?s writing, and those who haven?t yet enjoyed the power of his storytelling, will thrill at the discovery of one of the best-loved writers of our time.

Discussion Guide

1. Are you surprised by the various reactions from the people who receive the phone calls from heaven? How do you think you would react if you were to receive such a call?

2. How do these phone calls from heaven change the small midwestern town of Coldwater? Do you think it would be different if the same thing happened in a major city?

3. How do the town?s different religious leaders handle the news of the calls? What would you do if you were a spiritual guide like Pastor Warren, and one of your parish members broke such news to you?

4. One of the most serious concerns of the religious leaders was the idea that, ?if people truly believed they were talking with heaven, how soon before they expected to hear from the Lord?? What are the implications of this question? Do you think this is a legitimate concern?

5. If you could hear from someone you have lost, would you want to? If so, who would you most want to hear from?

6. Throughout the novel, Mitch Albom interweaves the story of Alexander Graham Bell and the telephone. Why do you think he includes this? How is it connected to the main story and how does it illuminate the novel's message?

7. Is Sully a good man? Describe him. What emotions motivate him when we first meet him? Is he the same person at the end of the novel? Why is he skeptical from the very beginning? Why drives him to find the truth? Did he do the right thing trying to find answers? Are the answers he finds those he was truly looking for?

8. What advice would you give Sully to help him protect his son, yet help him understand death in the cycle of life?

9. The role of media and technology plays a big part in spreading the news of the phone calls. Is our instant connectedness ultimately a good thing? Can it have a detrimental effect? What about Amy, the journalist who broke the original story? How does she feel about her role? How does her outlook change as the novel progresses? What factors influence her viewpoint?

10. Towns like Coldwater face major social and economic problems today, thanks to global competition, economic contraction, and a host of other issues. Do these problems make it more likely that people would cling to a miracle like a phone call from heaven? Might the reaction have been different in better times?

11. What propelled Horace to do the things he did? Were his motives pure? Sully accuses Horace of giving people false hope. Horace asks him, ?What is false about hope?? Is there such a thing as false hope? Do you sympathize with Horace?s actions?

12. One of the effects of the phone calls is to drive people back to organized religion and their individual houses of worship. Why? What role does faith and God play in the community both before the phone calls and after? What about individual characters' lives? Choose a few and use examples from the book to support your discussion.

13. How does belief enhance our lives, and how can it be destructive? Pastor Warren advices Elias, ?If you believe it, you don?t need proof.? Do you agree with this? Should proof matter?

14. What do you think will happen to the characters and this town? What has the impact of the event had on all their lives? Was the event ultimately positive or negative? Did you have a favorite character? If so, what drew you to this person?

15. What did you take away from reading THE FIRST PHONE CALL FROM HEAVEN?

Author Bio

Mitch Albom is the author of numerous books of fiction and nonfiction, which have collectively sold more than 42 million copies in 48 languages worldwide. He has written seven #1 *New York Times* bestsellers --- including TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE, the bestselling memoir of all time, which topped the list for four straight years --- award-winning TV films, stage plays, screenplays, a nationally syndicated newspaper column, and a musical. Through his work at the *Detroit Free Press*, he was inducted into both the National Sports Media Association and Michigan Sports halls of

fame and is the recipient of the 2010 Red Smith Award for lifetime achievement.

He founded the nonprofit SAY Detroit, which provides pathways to success for Detroiters in need through major health, housing and education initiatives. He also founded a dessert shop and a gourmet popcorn line to help fund it. Albom operates Have Faith Haiti, a home and school for impoverished children and orphans in Port-au-Prince, which he visits monthly. He lives with his wife, Janine, in Michigan.

Critical Praise

?Albom has a nose for ?thin places?: places where the boundary between secular and sacred is porous, and ultimate meaning is easier to encounter? This brisk, page-turner of a story [is] another winner from Albom.?

? *Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

?A beautifully rendered tale of faith and redemption that makes us think, feel, and hope --- and then doubt and then believe, as only Mitch Albom can make us do.?

? Garth Stein, *New York Times* bestselling author of THE ART OF RACING IN THE RAIN

?Beautiful and smart. Perhaps the most stirring and transcendent heaven story since FIELD OF DREAMS.?

? Matthew Quick, *New York Times* bestselling author of THE SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK and THE GOOD LUCK OF RIGHT NOW

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