



A READER'S GUIDE FOR BOOK CLUBS, FAITH GROUPS, ALL-KINDS-OF-GROUPS, AND INDIVIDUALS

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GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

- ☺ The stories in *Recipes for a Sacred Life: True Stories and a Few Miracles* love to be read out loud. Read your favorites in your group or to a family member or a friend.
- ☺ Share which stories mean the most to you and why.
- ☺ Use a journal to record your responses to the questions and activities listed below.
- ☺ From the many suggested activities in this guide, choose those that resonate with you or your group. Individuals can share with a friend or family member or write in a journal.

INTRODUCTION: BEGINNINGS

- ☺ Before or after reading “Beginnings,” or upon completion of the book, imagine what a sacred life would look like for you. Close your eyes and envision a year in the future. You’re living a sacred life. What does it look like? It might be just the way you’re living now, or you may be doing or seeing new things. What do your surroundings look like? Who is with you? How do you start your day and then spend your time? How do you feel? Whatever comes to mind is just right! After a few minutes, open your eyes and write down or share what you envisioned.

PART ONE: BASIC INGREDIENTS

Story: “Grateful in Harlem”

- ☺ To Do: If you don’t already keep a gratitude journal, now is a good time to start. Simply follow Billie’s directions in the story and write a list of your gratefuls. Don’t forget to include what “I love in me” The more love you give yourself, the more love you’ll have for others.

Story: “My Mother-in-Law’s Bedroom”

- ☺ To Share: Think of someone you know, met, or read about whose life is very different from yours and whom you admire. What parts of how they live would you like to emulate?

Story: “Miracles to Share”

- ☺ To Share or Do: This is the story that I especially hope will inspire you to share similar memories. Tell or write about miracles you’ve experienced or witnessed. As the story states, in the words of Brian Luke Seaward, “I imagine that if, indeed, we did share these on a regular basis, we might be living in a much different world. Perhaps a better world.”

Story: “*Gracias, Gracias*”

☺ To Share: What volunteer activities have you done, and which meant the most to you? How have you felt doing volunteer work? Is there volunteer work you would like to explore?

PART TWO: THE SUN IS RISING

☺ To Share and Do: After reading “A Good Day to Die . . . or Not” in Part One and “Hello to the Sun” and “The First Few Steps” in Part Two, share your morning rituals (even as simple as resting while drinking a cup of coffee). Then pick one suggestion from these stories to try out for a week. On the following week, share how this new ritual affected you and your day.

PART THREE: ANIMAL CHATS AND OTHER UNIONS WITH NATURE

☺ To Share: Share the special feelings and experiences you’ve had with animals or nature and tell about the natural places that feel sacred to you.

PART FOUR: TO FORGIVE IS DIVINE

☺ To Share: Talk together about forgiveness and why it can feel so hard to forgive.

☺ To Do: Think of someone you’re angry at and having trouble forgiving (but don’t start with the most challenging one!). With that person in mind, do one of the exercises outlined in the stories “What the Dalai Lama Said” or “Rites of Forgiveness.” Then share how the exercise affected your feelings.

PART FIVE: FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS, LOVERS AND STRANGERS

Story: “On the ‘A’ Train”

☺ To Do: Pick one day when you will nod or smile at every person you pass or encounter. Share what happened and how you felt.

Story: “Recipes for Partners: Keeping Love Sacred”

☺ To Do: After reading this story, choose one of the suggested “recipes” to practice in the coming week. Your “partner” can be a romantic partner or a friend, neighbor, relative, or colleague. (Sharing “What I’m grateful for today” is a wonderful activity to do with children at dinner or bedtime.)

☺ To Share: At the following meeting, share how doing this activity affected your relationship.

PART SIX: A NATURE RECIPE FROM FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

☺ To Do: What area of need in the natural world do you feel most deeply about? What would you like to do to help heal this area? The first step could be simply finding out more information.

☺ To Do: Individually or as a group, read Siân Berry’s booklet *50 Ways to Help the Planet* and commit to doing one or more of the suggestions. (Here’s a list online: [https://www.50waystohelp.com/.](https://www.50waystohelp.com/))

PART SEVEN: SACRED SPACE. SACRED TIME.

☺ To Share: What feels sacred about your home now? Is there a room, picture, tableau, or arrangement that creates a feeling of peace?

☺ To Do: Create a sacred space (no matter how small) where you live, or display a photo, quote, or painting that uplifts or inspires you.

PART EIGHT: SOUL FOOD

Story: “Sacred Sound Bites”

☺ To Share: What meals feel sacred to you? Do you cherish a certain meal that’s connected to a holiday? Do certain foods in themselves feed your soul?

☺ To Do: Make your evening meal feel more special by lighting candles, saying a blessing, or adding something beautiful to the table.

PART NINE: RITUALS AND CELEBRATIONS: BIRTH TO DEATH AND IN-BETWEEN

☺ To Share: What weddings, birth celebrations, or memorial services have you attended that felt very special to you and why?

PART TEN: THIS, TOO, IS TRUE

☺ To Share: Since reading the book, have you changed your life in any way? Are there any activities, intentions, or rituals you’ve added or plan to add?

☺ To Do:

- In your notepad or journal, write a list of all that feels sacred in your life *now*, whatever you do that gives you a feeling of joy, grace, or connection. It could be as simple as listening to certain music, taking out the trash at night and looking at the stars, or helping others in some way.
- Look over your list and then write down whatever activities you’d like to add—anything you believe would add to your happiness or enhance your connection to the sacredness of life.

- Then, on sturdier paper and using colored markers or pens, write “A BLESSED DAY.” Under that heading, list all the things you do or would like to do to bring more joy, love, peace, and purpose into your life. Tape this list somewhere in your home where you’ll often see it.

My own “Blessed Day” list includes meditate, walk, eat healthy, and help others—as well as sweep the porch and empty wastebaskets! I made my list with colored pencils on drawing paper and taped it by my desk, so I often look at it and might then choose to do one of the things listed (especially if I’m feeling down).

FINAL ACTIVITY

☺ Many readers are surprised that my book is written very simply about very simple things—moments that meant something special to me and stayed in my mind and heart. Write your own recipe for a sacred life, perhaps inspired by one of the stories in the book. Share it in your group or with a friend. And then, if you’d like, email your vignette to Rivvy@rivvyneshama.com, and I will post it on my website.

Two things about your email: I wish to post all of the recipes I receive, so please keep your story brief, no longer than 260 words, and if you don’t get a response, assume the email never arrived and please resend it. Please add your name (first name only is fine), the city where you live, and, if you wish, a line or two about yourself.

I look forward to reading and sharing your recipes!