

## READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

# *When the Heart Waits*

Spiritual Direction for  
Life's Sacred Questions

by

Sue Monk Kidd

This reader's guide is designed for both individuals and groups to reflect on and discuss the themes that Kidd presents. Thoughtfully spend some time with these questions, either as you're making your way through the book, or after you're finished, in an effort to, as Kidd writes, "grapple with the sacred questions of life."

## WAITING AND INNER TRANSFORMATION

1. Sue Monk Kidd writes, “The sacred intent of life, of God [is] to move us continuously toward growth, toward recovering all that is lost and orphaned within us and restoring the divine image imprinted on our soul” (p. 4). What do you think God’s sacred intent for your life is?
2. When describing the “familiar circles of her life” (p. 5) during this period of discontent, Kidd uses the adjectives *suffocating*, *stale*, *unfulfilling*, and *stifling*. What adjectives would you choose to describe the state of your soul right now?
3. Kidd drew a tent in the middle of some wind-howling woods with the stakes pulled up to depict her life (p. 5). What image comes to mind when you think of your life?
4. Can inner pain be “a holy summons to a deeper spiritual life” (p. 8)? Think back on your life and identify what events or feelings led you to a new phase in your spiritual life.
5. Where do you look for truth and answers to your questions?
6. C. G. Jung divides life into two phases: morning, which is for relating to the outer world, and afternoon, which is for developing the full and true self. With these concepts in mind, determine what time it is in your life.
7. The transition between life stages often requires each of us to reevaluate the roles we play in life. Kidd identifies the roles of Perfectionist, Performer, Pleaser, Good Little

- Girl, submissive churchgoer, passive and traditional wife (p. 10). What are the overarching roles in your life?
8. When Kidd discovered the cocoon, she felt it symbolized a holy calling to a “season of waiting,” a “place of fertile emptiness” (p. 13). Have you or someone you know had a similar experience? When? What happened?
  9. Read Matthew 4:1–11 and 26:36–46. What happened to Jesus during these periods of waiting? What can you learn from Jesus’s example?
  10. Think of a time in your life when you had to wait for something to happen. How did you respond?
  11. At this point in this book, what questions and hopes do you have?

### WHO AM I?

1. Review the story of Kidd’s visit to St. Meinrad Archabbey on pages 21–22. Do you identify more with Kidd, who had trouble sitting and doing nothing, or with the monk, who believed that waiting allows the soul time to mature?
2. Is there a substance, an excuse, an escape, or a relationship that you use repeatedly or compulsively to stop your inner growth?
3. Kidd talks of the true self as a seed that already contains the potential for fullness and life. Read the seed parables in Mark 4:1–8, 26–29, and 30–32. In each story try to determine what the seed represents and what nourishes it and makes it grow.

4. Think back to a time when you were kept waiting. How did you feel about not being able to control your time? How did your body respond to having to be still?
5. Read Jeremiah 18:1–6. Imagine your true self is hidden inside a lump of clay waiting to be molded. Spend a few moments imagining God’s hands confidently and skillfully molding your life. Record what you think and feel during this exercise in your journal or draw a picture.
6. Who have been the mentors in your life? What did those relationships offer you? Why are role models important to spiritual growth?
7. Read Ephesians 4:11–16. What does it mean that we are to grow up in every way into Christ? Can all of your inner selves be a part of the whole body that Christ has created you to become?

### CRISIS AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

1. Daniel Levinson (p. 83) has identified the following adult developmental transitions: early adulthood (ages seventeen to twenty-two), midlife (forty to forty-five), and late adulthood (sixty to sixty-five). Where are you in these life stages? Have you experienced losses or adjustments during any of these transitions? What happened?
2. Has there ever been an intrusive event—a crisis forced upon you from external events, like a divorce, a child going to college, or the death of a parent—that has called you to a new way of living? What happened, and how did it change your life?

3. Have you ever experienced an internal uprising—an inner sense that “there must be more than this”?
4. Kidd identifies three ways of responding to crises (p. 88). Which one of these, if any best describes your response to the most recent crisis in your life?
5. Read Mark 10:17–22. What are the securities of the rich man? What provides security for you?
6. Kidd writes that life changes require that we “die to old roles” (p. 117) when we move from one stage to another. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
7. Kidd describes feeling ready to move into a new stage of life when she crossed a long, wooden bridge that spanned a deep chasm (pp. 117–19). She had to leave one way of living and be suspended in midair before she could reach the other side. What lies on either side of the bridge you must cross?

### WAITING ON GOD

1. Write a definition of *grace* in your own words.
2. Do you believe that “grace is everywhere” (p. 124)? Where have you experienced grace this past week?
3. Where, when, and how has God spoken to you in the past?
4. Read the definition of *cremaster* found pages 126 to 127. What serves as your anchor point—your still point?

5. Read Eugene Peterson's words found on page 129. What can you do to heighten your awareness of God's action in your life?
6. Read Luke 10:38–42. What is Mary's role in the story? What does she teach you about waiting?
7. Read Mark 14:32–42. What is the role of the disciples in the story? What do they teach you about waiting?
8. Read Mark 10:46–52. What is the role of Bartimaeus in the story? What does he teach you about waiting?

### ANTICIPATING NEW LIFE

1. When have you waited for new life to come? Have you ever seen new life? What did it look or feel like for you?
2. Read John 3:1–8. Why do you think Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be born again? What does this mean to you?
3. Have you ever experienced a dark night of the soul when confusion and uncertainty were everywhere and God seemed absent? What did you feel like? What happened to bring you out of it?
4. Kidd relays a sermon she heard preached: "The minister pointed out that the most significant events in Jesus's life took place in darkness: his birth, his arrest, his death, his resurrection. His point was that although darkness in the spiritual life has gotten a lot of bad press, it sometimes yields extraordinary events" (p. 151). Do you agree with the minister? Can dark times be transforming? Can

transformation take place during bright, happy, fulfilling times? Why or why not?

5. Kidd declares that the best “bread” that we have to offer one another during dark times is our stories. What Bible story or parable most nourishes you during this time? Why?
6. Read the Rainer Maria Rilke quotation on page 157. What are the unsolved questions in your life? How can you live these questions?
7. “Learning to descend into the body and create a loving and accepting relationship with it is a vital work of spiritual wholeness for a woman” (p. 165). One way to help identify how you feel about your body is to write a letter to it. Begin by thanking your body for all of its years of faithful service taking you places and allowing you to see, hear, taste, touch, and smell life. Confess any overly critical attitudes toward your body. Declare your desires to cooperate in a more loving way with your body—the partner to your soul.

### THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS OF WAITING

1. When Kidd’s butterfly emerged (p. 176), it had to pump its wings for a while to ready for flight. When it flew, it did so on wobbly wings. What new way of living are you ready to try, even if on wobbly wings? Be as specific as you can be.
2. Any changes you make will probably be met with some resistance, as those around us are affected by our

changes. What reactions do you expect? How will you hold fast to your growth despite resistance?

3. Kidd describes the gifts of the soul that brought new life to her. The first is delight that came from seeing God in a new light. The words of Mechtild are, “I, God, am your playmate! I will lead the child in you in wonderful ways for I have chosen you” (p. 186). This week take a piece of paper and crayons and draw what you think playing with God would look like.
4. Read Matthew 23:37. How has God been like a mother to you?
5. How does your spirituality connect with the way you treat the earth?
6. How have the last few weeks taught you to be genuinely present to life? Are you living more in *chronos* (clock time) or *kairos* (holy time)? Can you think of an experience when you knew your life and God’s time had intersected?
7. Read the Hasidic tale on page 196. Write a one-sentence answer to the question, “Who am I?”
8. Who are the suffering ones in the world whose cries are echoing inside of you? Whose suffering moves your heart?
9. What gift of the heart has God given you through this study? Bring an object to share with the group as a symbol of what God is doing in your life.