

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

Breaking Up with God:

A Love Story

PROLOGUE

1. Sarah Sentilles titled her book *Breaking Up with God: A Love Story*. Why do you think she compares her relationship with God to a romance? What metaphor would you use for your relationship with God?

CHAPTER 1: FROM AFAR

1. What was your experience with religion as a child? How did you understand God? What kinds of questions did you ask about God? Who listened to your questions? How did people respond to your questions? How has your understanding evolved? Have you

changed your religious affiliation since childhood?
Why or why not?

2. Sentilles writes about her eating disorder in high school and about her shame, negative view of her body, and desire to take up less space in the world. Do you have a first memory of feeling ashamed or embarrassed about your body? What is your first memory of feeling grateful for your body? How has your body image been influenced by religion or spirituality?

CHAPTER 2: THE ART OF LOVE

1. Throughout *Breaking Up with God*, Sentilles reveals how her relationship with God influenced other relationships in her life—with her family, with people she dated, and with herself. How does your understanding of God or your religion/spirituality affect your life and relationships?
2. Sentilles writes, “I felt my childhood version of God starting to disappear. Make-believe, I thought. It’s all make-believe. We make, and then we believe.” What does she mean by this? In this chapter, Sentilles begins to explore possible connections between faith and art. How does this theme unfold in the book? How do you understand the relationship between human creativity and meaning/faith/religion?

CHAPTER 3: GOD + SARAH = LOVE

1. In describing a workshop on prayer that she attended at All Saints, Sentilles writes “We don’t have to have everything just right to pray,” the woman leading the workshop says. “We just have to tell the truth. If we can’t be honest with God, we can’t be honest with anyone.” Sentilles asks herself what honest prayers sound like, and then she answers her own question: “They sound like morning pages.” What does Sentilles mean? With whom in your life can you be honest? With whom can you be your whole self?
2. What do you think led Sentilles to write a book about her students in Compton and to become an Episcopal priest? How did you choose the work you do in the world? Do you understand your work as a vocation, a calling? What work is most meaningful to you and brings you the most joy?

CHAPTER 4: MOVING IN TOGETHER

1. Sentilles describes the first meeting of a seminar she took with the theologian Gordon Kaufman. Kaufman asks a student why he calls “walking in the woods” a religious experience. Kaufman then argues that we have pre-existing ideas about what “religious” means. In other words, Kaufman believes language shapes our experience. Do you agree with Kaufman? Why or why

not? Have you had what you might call a “religious experience”? Where were you? What was it like?

2. In divinity school, Sentilles encounters texts by feminist, black, womanist, queer, and liberation theologians for the first time. How does studying theology change her relationship with God? Throughout the book, Sentilles includes examples of various understandings of God—a Sunday School God, Mary Daly’s God, James Cone’s God, Desmond Tutu’s God, a Philosopher’s God, etc. Which version of God resonated with you? Which surprised you? Which did you struggle with?

CHAPTER 5:

WHO ARE YOU AND WHY ARE YOU IN MY HOUSE?

1. Sentilles writes about her struggle with prayer, and in Chapter 5, after the little girl at the church and her friend die, she stops praying. When people in the congregation ask her to pray for them, she says she will keep them in her thoughts, hold them in the light. Then she writes, “The only other prayer I had left was gratitude.” Do you pray? Why or why not? How do you think of prayer? Do you have any practices in your life that you consider a form of prayer?
2. Sentilles writes about how her life experiences—teaching in Compton, attending divinity school, working at a church, losing a friend—change her faith, her relationship with God, and her worldview. What life experiences have changed you?

CHAPTER 6: SEEING OTHER PEOPLE

1. When Sentilles becomes a vegetarian, she claims going to the farmers' market and eating in season as a kind of faith. Do you have any daily or weekly activities that you think of as rituals? What daily practices give life meaning for you?
2. Religion, politics, and ethics are interconnected for Sentilles. How do you understand the relationship among these categories?
3. "This is my faith: a fragile hope in what humanity might be able to do when we stop looking for someone else to save us." What does this statement mean to you? What gives you hope?

POSTSCRIPT

1. People often ask Sentilles if she's still Christian. Have you ever been afraid to tell someone about your faith or lack of faith? Have you ever been afraid to share your religious affiliation? Have you ever been afraid to say you are an atheist or an agnostic? Share some examples of positive or difficult conversations you have had with people about meaning, religion, faith, or spirituality.