

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

The Sacred Journey

by

Frederick Buechner

1. Reflecting upon his life and his faith journey, Frederick Buechner concludes that “if God speaks to us at all in this world, if God speaks anywhere, it is into our personal lives that he speaks” (p. 1). Can you recall a meaningful moment in your personal life when you heard God speaking to you?
2. Buechner poses the rhetorical question of whether sin itself could be a means of grace (p. 3). What are your thoughts on this matter?
3. Thinking about his caregiver during early childhood, Buechner writes, “Nor do I know what became of her after she left, and there is a sadness in not knowing, in thinking of all the mothers and fathers we have all of us had who, for the little we remember them, might as well never have existed at all except for the deep and

hidden ways in which they exist in us still” (p. 14). Is there a person from your childhood who has faded from your memory but who left a mark on your soul?

4. Buechner quotes a piece of wisdom from one of Frank L. Baum’s *Oz* books, given to the character Rinkitink: “Never question the truth of what you fail to understand, for the world is filled with wonders” (p. 16). What do you make of this statement? Do you agree?
5. Another book that carries great significance for Buechner is Graham Greene’s *The Power and the Glory*, whose protagonist was a “seedy alcoholic little failure of a man” who, Buechner says, shines forth the power and the glory of God (p. 17). How do you think a man with such a character could demonstrate the glory of God? What does this say about how we relate to people, perhaps especially people we might deem rough around the edges?
6. Buechner asserts that memory is “a looking out into another kind of time altogether where everything that ever was continues not just to be, but to grow and change with the life that is in it still” (p. 21). If memory is integral to inner growth and ongoing change, as Buechner suggests, what do you make of Paul’s exhortation about “forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead” (Philippians 3:13–14)?
7. When Buechner speaks of his father, who committed suicide when Buechner was ten, he recalls his mother telling him that his father was gentle and the world is not gentle. Does this suggest that those who possess a

gentle demeanor are destined for heartache and tragedy? How might a gentle spirit successfully navigate a harsh world?

8. After his father's death, Buechner writes of his grandmother sitting in her chair by the window: "She stared her doom straight in the eye until somehow she finally managed to stare it down altogether to emerge doom-proof at last with even her mirth intact" (p. 45). How does one vanquish doom? Have you ever experienced anything like this?
9. In the years following his father's death, Buechner's mother took him and his brother to Bermuda, which he likens to the magical island in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "Be not affeared, the Isle is full of noyses, / Sounds, and sweet aires, that give delight and hurt not" (p. 48). Do you believe that a physical locale can carry an invisible power that elevates and comforts a person? Conversely, could a place carry a sense of darkness and doom? Have you experienced either?
10. Buechner asserts that reality is "whatever there is that seems real," commenting that "we all create our own realities as we go along" (p. 53). Do you agree? Why or why not?
11. Buechner urges us to listen to our lives: "Your life is happening. You are happening. You, the rooster, the clock, the workmen, your stomach, are all happening together. A journey, years long, has brought each of you through thick and thin to this moment in time" (p. 77).

How would you describe the journey of your life to this point? What are some of its defining elements?

12. Recalling his years in the army, Buechner notes that being outdoors so much helped him realize that the earth itself is a haven and a home. Have you experienced a similar feeling? How so?
13. Buechner quotes John Donne: “I shall see and see cheerfully that last day of judgment, which shall have no night, never end, and be united to the Ancient of Days, to God himself, who had no morning, never began.” Buechner then responds that he could not hear such passion in another’s words without catching an echo of it in his own life (p. 93). Have you ever experienced the contagious passion for God through someone else’s words or actions? How did you respond? How has it continued to affect your life?
14. Buechner concludes that true peace, “the high and bidding peace that passeth all understanding, is to be had not in retreat from the battle, but only in the thick of battle” (p. 107). How can going into the thick of battle render peace?
15. At a critical moment in his conversion process, Buechner heard a pastor speak about finding the kingdom of God in the midst of “confession, and tears, and great laughter” (p. 109). He was particularly struck by the notion of laughter. Has laughter been a part of your faith experience? How so?