

In Reading Groups

Book Discussion Guide from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

by Jeff Langford



The Forgetting Time

by Sharon Guskin

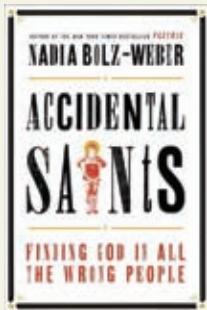
Single mom Janie is trying to figure out what is going on with her eccentric son Noah. As psychologist Jerome Anderson approaches the end of his life, Noah may be the case to validate his belief that there is something beyond what anyone could see or comprehend.

1. What is the significance of the boy being named Noah?
2. How did you react to the first words of Dr. Anderson's manuscript? "Even though it may seem hard to believe, evidence might exist that life after death is actually a reality." How does evidence factor into your faith? Do people think of evidence and belief as opposites in the same way life and death are juxtaposed?
3. How did the death of Owen change the course of Dr. Anderson's life? How did it change Jerry and Sheila's marriage?
4. A former colleague mockingly refers to Dr. Anderson's work as "soul business." How would you describe his work?
5. How did Dr. Anderson's aphasia affect the book's plot? How did it affect the Dr. Anderson's character throughout the novel?
6. Janie notices a waitress's YOLO tattoo during her first meeting with Jerry. How does a "You Only Live Once" worldview affect a person's behavior? Would a belief in reincarnation produce different behaviors?
7. After Dr. Anderson talks to Noah about his nightmare, Janie thinks to herself: "But there was no going back, was there? Wasn't that the lesson of adulthood, of motherhood? You had to be where you were. The life you're living, the moment you're in." How does the dynamic of going back and being present play out in the book?
8. The false connection between Noah and Ashview's Tommy Moran seemed obvious in retrospect. How did guilt, regret and sorrow play into Melissa Moran's eager belief in reincarnation? Are these kinds of emotions part of Christian faith as well?
9. Significant losses shape the book's main characters in different ways. Which character's experience and reactions most resonated with you?
10. Denise Crawford resists a possible affair with her boss primarily because of her younger son, Charlie. "It must have been the mother in her, still alive, even then, drawing her back from the oblivion she craved so very much." Recall other moments when motherhood plays a significant role in the novel.
11. Dr. Anderson remembers the case of Preeta, an Indian girl who re-enacted her previous personality's death. "What did it signify, to be reborn only to relive the previous life's anguish? What was the sense in that? What was the meaning?" What factors helped Noah escape the anguish of his previous life? How do (born again) Christians escape their previous life's anguish?
12. In the beginning, Dr. Anderson's legacy as a legitimate scientist motivates his work with Noah and Janie. How do his motivations change throughout the book? What becomes his motivating force in the end?

13. Denise Crawford struggles to find a word to define herself after Tommy's death: "Tommy was dead and she was a—what? Not a widow, not an orphan. There was no word for what she was." Why do you think this gap exists in the English language?
14. Dr. Anderson summarizes Americans' approach to death: "Americans couldn't help but cling tightly to the life they were living like clutching a spindly branch that was sure to break..." How does this approach to life affect the characters in the book? Where did you see the idea of resignation or letting go throughout the novel?
15. The stories of reincarnation in the book all involve tragic deaths. How does this compare to the idea of haunting and ghosts?
16. Denise Crawford recalls going to a tent revival in Oklahoma with her grandfather, where all the people who came for healing seemed to be related to each other. "I'm Sister Green. I'm Brother Morgan. Like that. One after the other. And all of them were sick." How does common human suffering bring together the characters in the novel?
17. Did the circumstances of Tommy's death surprise you? How did you feel toward Paul Clifford?
18. Why did Paul choose to confess to the police?
19. Why does Henry Crawford not believe in Noah's connection to Tommy?
20. As Denise Crawford gives Noah a bath, she tells herself: "Focus on the love. You'll be all right." How does focusing on love help the main characters deal with their circumstances?
21. In the Epilogue, Janie meets a homeless man on the subway and treats him with dignity. How does Jesus' teaching about caring for the "least of these" resonate with Janie's recognition of the connectedness of the human family?
22. Why does Denise Crawford ask Paul Clifford to write to her?
23. Why is the novel entitled *The Forgetting Time*?

Jeff Langford is coordinator of CBF Heartland and serves as editor of CBF's missional formation curriculum.

NEXT MONTH



Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People

by Nadia Bolz-Weber

Tattooed, angry and profane, this former standup comic turned pastor stubbornly resists the God she feels called to serve. But as Bolz-Weber lives and worships alongside "accidental saints," she is swept into first-hand encounters with God's grace.