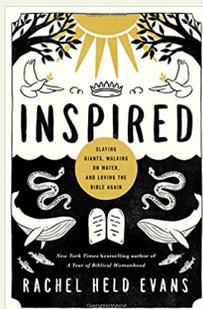


# In Reading Groups

Book Discussion Guide from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

by Elizabeth Andrasi Deere



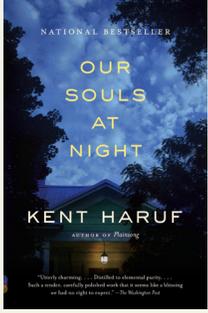
## *Inspired* by Rachel Held Evans

Drawing upon recent scholarship and literary analysis, Evans creatively retells our favorite Bible stories and connects them to our present-day ones. Readers are invited to fall in love with Scripture all over again without checking their intellect at the door.

1. In the introduction Rachel tells the story of her relationship with the Bible throughout her life. What has been your journey with the Bible thus far? How does this journey intersect with your origin story, which Rachel introduces in chapter 1?
2. Rachel spends time throughout the book creatively retelling biblical stories; she also introduces us to the tradition of midrash. Have you ever creatively engaged the biblical text, adding details between the lines? Perhaps you have if you have taught children, or retold Bible stories for youth. Could you practice retelling stories to yourself as you read scripture by entering the text, so to speak, and imagining what conversations might be happening between the lines, what smells or sounds you might encounter, how you might feel if you were there?
3. What do you think about the idea that God “stoops” (Chapter 1)? Rachel provides a list of instances where God stoops to meet people as recorded in scripture, can you think of other ways God stoops—either in scripture or in your life?
4. “While Christians tend to turn to Scripture to end a conversation, Jews turn to Scripture to start a conversation” (P. 24, Ch. 1). What would it look like in your faith to allow Scripture to start conversations—both between you and God, and you and other people?
5. “With Scripture, we’ve not been invited to an academic fraternity; we’ve been invited to a wrestling match. We’ve been invited to a dynamic, centuries-long conversation with God and God’s people that has been unfolding since creation, one story at a time. If we’re lucky, it will leave us with a limp” (P. 28, Ch. 1). Are there passages of Scripture that you’ve avoided? How might you wrestle with God through them?
6. “They say art should afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. I think the same is true for Scripture. For centuries the Bible’s stories of deliverance have offered comfort to the suffering and a challenge to the privileged” (P. 43, Ch. 2). How does Scripture challenge or comfort you?
7. In chapter 2, Rachel speaks of how, over time, she has begun to listen intentionally to voices of her “neighbors of color, and those with disabilities, and those living in the developing world because [she] hadn’t learned to center their stories, to see things from their point of view” (P. 42, Ch. 2). Whose stories are you listening to?
8. “So the question we have to ask ourselves is this: are we reading with the prejudice of love, with Christ as our model, or are we reading with the prejudices of judgment and power, self-interest and greed? Are we seeking to enslave or liberate, burden or set free” (P. 56, Ch. 2)? I invite you to consider these questions from Rachel next time you read Scripture.
9. Much of Rachel’s story, and the impetus for much of her study and writing, is her wrestling with religious doubt. In chapter 3 she talks about how this doubt often isolated her from

- community in various ways. Have you ever doubted something about God? Did you tell anyone? If so, how was it received? If not, why not?
10. In chapter 3, War Stories, Rachel says this, “If the Bible’s texts of terror compel us to face with fresh horror and resolve the ongoing oppression and exploitation of women, then perhaps these stories do not trouble us in vain. Perhaps we can use them for some good” (P. 76, Ch. 3). Have you ever grappled with these war stories and “texts of terror”? If so, how did you come away from your wrestling? Would you consider turning to face these texts again and reflect on how you might use them for some good?
  11. What was challenging for you about chapter 3? Is there anything you disagreed with? Is there anything Rachel presented that you are still thinking and praying about?
  12. “Wisdom is a way of life, a journey of humility and faithfulness we take together, one step at a time” (P. 97, Ch. 4). Rachel goes on in chapter 4 to explore the different views the Bible offers on various topics and situations. She also explores the various genres and the history of Scripture’s compilation and the ways different religious traditions bring the various texts together. She pushes back on the tendency to view Scripture as a manual. What do you think about this? How might the Bible still contribute wisdom if this is true? Was there anything she presented in this chapter that was new information to you?
  13. “Wisdom, it seems, is situational. It isn’t just about knowing what to say; it’s about knowing when to say it. And it’s not just about knowing what is true; it’s about knowing when it’s true” (P. 98, Ch. 4). Do you think wisdom is situational? How do you discern what is wise?
  14. In chapter 4 Rachel compares and contrasts two movies (P. 105-106, Ch. 4) she shares that she gleaned more from the “secular” film than the “Christian” one. What is your reaction to this? Have you ever found yourself interacting with art in a similar way in your own life? Please share.
  15. “For far too long, the white American church has chosen the promise of power over prophetic voice. We have allied ourselves with the empire, and rather than singing songs of hopeful defiance with the exiles, created more of them. We have, consciously and unconsciously, done the bidding of the Beast—not in every case, of course, but in far too many” (P. 128, Ch. 5). If you consider yourself a part of the white American church, are you following the lead of prophets in our day? If so, how? If not, why?
  16. If you don’t consider yourself a part of the white American church, what is your response to Rachel’s chapter, “The Beast”? If you do consider yourself a part of the white American church, what is your response?
  17. What do you think it means to be political without being partisan? (P. 129, Ch. 5)
  18. Throughout chapter 5, Rachel refers to “apocalyptic literature” (like the books of Daniel and Revelation). What was your interaction with these Scriptural texts prior to reading this book? Was anything she shared surprising to you?
  19. In chapter 6 Rachel says, “in Scripture, no two people encounter Jesus in exactly the same way. Not once does anyone pray the “Sinner’s Prayer” or ask Jesus into their heart. The good news is good for the whole world, certainly, but what makes it good varies from person to person and community to community” (P. 151, Ch. 6). What do you think about this statement? How has testimony from someone else impacted your own faith journey?
  20. Have you ever struggled with the miracle stories in Scripture? Was there anything Rachel wrote in chapter 7 that you found helpful? Surprising? Challenging?
  21. What do you think of Rachel’s assertion that, “the point isn’t just that Jesus healed these people; the point is that Jesus touched these people”(P. 184, Ch. 7)? A few pages later she goes on to say, “perhaps most miraculous was the apostles’ continued embrace of outsiders” (P. 186, Ch. 7). In light of these statements, where have you seen miracles in your own life?
  22. In chapter 8, Rachel describes the complicated relationship she, and the Church, has had with the Apostle Paul. Can you relate to her experience? What do you think about where she has landed in her understanding of the Apostle and his letters?
  23. How has reading this book impacted the way you read Scripture? How has it impacted the way you commune with God?
  24. As you read, was there anything with which you disagreed? If you were face-to-face with Rachel Held Evans, how would you talk with her about the areas where you disagree?
  25. Did reading this book inspire you to further study? If so, what will be your next step in pursuing this?
  26. As the epilogue closes Rachel shares about her conversations with her two-year-old son; the questions he asks and the stories she tells. As you close this book, what questions are you asking, and what stories are you telling?

# NEXT MONTH



## *Our Souls at Night* by Kent Haruf

Addie Moore pays an unexpected visit to a neighbor, Louis Waters. Her husband died years ago, as did his wife. Addie and Louis have long been living alone in empty houses. As Addie and Louis come to know each other better, a story of second chances unfolds.