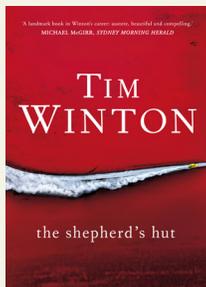


In Reading Groups

Book Discussion Guide from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

by Elizabeth Andrasi Deere



The Shepherd's Hut

by Tim Winton

Jaxie Clackton flees from the scene of his father's violent death and strikes out for the vast wilds of Western Australia. But once he discovers he's not alone out there, all Jaxie's plans go awry. He meets a fellow exile, the ruined priest Fintan MacGillis, a man on whom his life will soon depend.

Note: *The Shepherd's Hut contains strong language and themes which may be offensive to many readers.*

I

1. Describe the town, Monkton, where Jaxie lived with his father and mother. How did their neighbors view them? Who offered them help or friendship?
2. What was Jaxie's relationship to church? To prayer?
3. "Maybe if they give up their Jesus talk and let me sneak on that bus they could of saved me then and there. Not that I woulda gone, not with me mum to think of, but if they only knew what kind of saving I needed it might of shut their gobs and taught them something." (22-23) What is your reaction to this statement Jaxie makes about the bus full of people that came to their town to evangelize?
4. Pay attention to the adults in Jaxie's life. How do they treat him? How does he treat them? What about his peers? What are their relationships and interactions like?

5. Pay attention to the meat/butchering imagery and the way Jaxie describes people's eyes throughout the story. Why do you think the author chooses these images and descriptions?
6. What does Jaxie uncover about his relationship with his parents as he journeys on his own? What did they teach him that is keeping him alive now? How does he understand his family? How does he understand himself?
7. Who is Lee? How is she different than everyone else Jaxie knows or describes?
8. What are Jaxie's reactions to death and violence throughout the story? Do they change at all? Are you surprised by any of them?
9. What does Jaxie do when he encounters another human for the first time on his journey?

10. "Maybe the Captain started out decent but he spoiled. Anything with blood in it can probably go bad. Like meat. And it's the blood that makes me worry. It carries things you don't even know you've got" (105). What do you think about this rumination? What point is Jaxie making and how does it inform his choices and how he understands himself?

II

11. How is Jaxie received when he wakes up in the first scene of this second part of the book? How would you have received him, or someone like him?
12. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help." Do you think Jaxie and Fintan MacGillis are friends? Do they? Keep considering this question as you finish the novel.
13. "I asked him did he still believe in God. He said he wasn't sure, not if God was the peevish schoolmaster he was raised on" (177). Are there any images of God that you, like Fintan, wrestle with or have a hard time believing?
14. What type of growth do you see in Jaxie on pages 182-185?

15. How has Fintan seen and reacted to death? What do you think of the conversation he and Jaxie have in the last pages of section II? With what do you agree or disagree?

III

16. “But I suspect that God is what you do, not what or who you believe in... But when you do right, Jaxie, when you make good—well, then you are an instrument of God. Then you are joined to the divine, to the life-force, to life itself. That’s what I believe. That’s what I hope for. And it’s what I have missed.” (233) What do you think of this declaration from Fintan? Do you agree? Disagree? Have any questions?

17. “He called after me. You, he said. Jaxie. You’re the one, boy. It was always you. You’re the man” (240). What do you think Fintan means with these words? How does Jaxie receive them? Compare this with the scene on pages 262-266. What is different between the way Jaxie receives Fintan’s words?

18. What is Jaxie Clackton? Who is Jaxie Clackton?

Final Questions

19. Tim Winton is a masterful writer, he builds characters and paints scenes that immediately come to life for the reader. What are some scenes that you return to or think about now that you have finished the book? Why do they stand out to you? What are they teaching you about yourself, other people, the world, and God?

20. What are some themes, images, or metaphors you noticed while reading? If you were to read the book again, what would you pay closer attention to? Why?

21. As you reflect on the story as a whole and the questions raised through this study guide, where do you see glimmers of hope, growth, or redemption for Tim Winton’s characters?

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