



The Shepherd's Song

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Reading Group Guide

Introduction

The Shepherd's Song tells the story of Kate McConnell and her unparalleled faith in God's master plan. The day before suffering a terrible car accident, Kate copies, by hand, Psalm 23 for her wayward son, Matt. This little piece of paper makes its way around the world, touching the lives of twelve distinct individuals, all in need of God's powerful words. In the end, the psalm makes its way back into Matt's hands, bringing the story full circle and fulfilling Kate's mission to spread God's love.

Questions for Discussion

1. The story of *The Shepherd's Song* begins with Psalm 23 on page xi. Reread the psalm aloud to your group. How does the psalm act as a framework for the novel? What is Kate's relationship to the psalm? What is yours? If you could summarize Psalm 23's message in just one sentence, what would it be?
2. "She felt the ambulance sway, then the jolt of a sharp turn. 'Help.' Kate gasped again as pain stabbed through her side. 'Stay with me.' A wave of dizziness. Then nothing" (5-6). Return to

this opening scene in the ambulance. What first impression does Kate make on you? How would you characterize her?

3. When John McConnell learns of his wife's accident, his reaction is one of determination: "There will be a way to fix this. There is always a way to fix things" (13). Do you agree with John's statement? Discuss the ways in which what he says is true and the ways in which he is wrong.

4. Discuss how second chances are a theme for the novel. Who gets a second chance in *The Shepherd's Song*? Who doesn't?

5. On page 20 Kate's last thought is revealed: *Please, let my life count*. What do you think Kate meant by saying this? In your opinion, is her last wish realized?

6. How would you describe John and Matt McConnell? How would their lives be different without Kate? Use one word to describe the impact Kate had on her husband and son.

7. "There was something almost irresistible about nice clothes. It was like he could become someone else, someone worthy" (25). In what ways does borrowing Matt McConnell's peacoat change Chris's life?

8. On page 71, François wonders aloud to himself, “But how in the world do you restore a soul?” Answer François’s question, using examples of times in your life when you felt your soul needed restoring.

9. The sight of his newborn son turns Patrick’s life around. Revisit the scene of Patrick’s homecoming on page 87–88, taking note of the many ways in which Patrick realizes God’s love all around him. Why do you think children so often bring about such realizations in life? Has this happened to you?

10. Why do you think Marra chooses to tell her life story through tattoos? If you were to summarize your life in an image, what would it be and why?

11. To which story did you most relate? Which story touched you the most? Why?

12. Discuss the ending chapter of *The Shepherd’s Song*. On what note does the story that began this book, end? What are the most poignant lessons you take away from the book?

Additional Activities: Ways of Enhancing Your Book Club

1. On page 168, Judy describes her Thanksgiving traditions to Roland, making his mouth water in the process. Host a faux Thanksgiving dinner with your book club. Have each member bring a dish that is important to his or her Thanksgiving tradition. Over dinner, have each member share a personal recipe and why that particular dish is so important to him or her. Take a moment to

thank God for the many ways in which your own cup runs over, and after, discuss with your book club Roland's encounter with Judy. Has there ever been a "Judy" in your life?

2. Cornelia's short story about Little Bunny gives a lot of insight into her own life and character.

Reread Cornelia's short story on pages 188–189. Then have each member write his or her own "Little Bunny story," using Cornelia's as a model. Share the stories out loud with the group; explain how your story reflects some aspect of your life.

3. Continue in the vein of *The Shepherd's Song* by reading either Andy Andrews's *The Butterfly Effect* or his *The Traveler's Gift*. What common theme can be found in the two novels you've read? How does each touch on the notion of faith changing the world?