

## **OUTSIDE EDEN – DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### Introduction

1. Pg. 5 Par. 2 - *This is all it really means to be a believer. It is to realize that you've been snatched out of oblivion by life. You don't have life, life has you.*  
Do you see the closeness of God in life? Where do you see it? Where don't you see it?
2. Pg. 5 Par. 4 - *You may not be able to get back to the garden, but the residual memory of paradise remains, lingering like a scent of jasmine in the air. You are a paradise-haunted creature.*  
How is the idea/(reality?) of paradise on earth lived in your life?
3. Pg. 7 Par. 4 - *We are anxious to hear from you and to be blessed by you because our minds are nickel-and-dimed to death.*  
Do you ever feel that who you are is defined by what you can do and it is in looking for the world's approval that you attempt to find your meaning? Is it possible that life is defined by something else altogether? What would that be? And how would you *measure* up to that new understanding?

## **FIRST BOOK**

### *Patience*

### Tears in a Bottle

1. Pg. 10 Par. 1 - *in the interior stillness she would await the Spirit's guidance.*  
How do you listen for the Spirit to speak to you? Do you have a daily spiritual discipline?
2. Pg. 12 Par. F2 - *I became aware that tears are her work...I think the mystery is a web of underground compassion.*  
Christ works in the moments of human life. Can you think of a time when you felt used and directed by God in a compassionate way?  
All of these vignettes have an *everydayness* about them. How could we become that underground of compassion of which Peter Short is speaking?

### Freed from Illusion

1. Pg. 15 Last Par. - *The end of illusion takes you down into a world whose mystery cannot be managed and whose landscape is infinitely more demanding and astounding.*  
Can you remember a time when an illusion of yours was shattered? How did it affect you negatively and positively?
2. Pg. 16 Par. 5 - *Here, at the end of illusion, you learn that in this life if you win it all and don't know how to love, you have nothing.*  
What is your understanding of *illusion* as referred to by this sentence?

3. Pg. 17 - *You had something better in store. Something more like you.*  
What is the difference between having all our wishes and fantasies fulfilled, and engaging in the search for God or ultimate truth?  
Why is the trip from illusion to freedom a difficult road?

When you are a Black Angel

1. Pg. 20 Par. 4 - *Do not be afraid. See I bring you good news of great joy.*  
It appears that a black angel is a person, *one of the adults who know. One of us.* When and where in your life did you meet up with a black angel? How was that person a blessing to you?
2. Pg. 22 Par. 1 - *Joy is not a good mood, it is a good truth: a truth that lies deep in the heart of things. Joy is folded like a garment placed by a loving hand at the bottom of the drawer that is your soul.*  
How do we go about bringing that joy, which is at the bottom of our souls, into our day to day living?

There's Heaven in this Ground

1. Pg. 24 Par. 6 - *If people start out with the idea that God's place is out of this world, it's little wonder they end up thinking of it seldom and caring about it less.*  
What is your current understanding of heaven? Is it the same as the kingdom?
2. Pg. 25 Par. 3 - *Maybe heaven is about life. Hell too, for that matter.*  
What does this mean to you?
3. Pg. 26 Par. 5 - *If we reach any profundity in life it is because life drives us down there.*  
Tell of something profound that you have learned in your life's journey.
4. Pg. 26 Last Par. - *You see that all along, your sisterhood and brotherhood with them was not something to be created. It had already been created. It only had to be recognized.*  
In Christ we meet our sisters and brothers on common ground. What does this statement suggest about how we are to live? Examine your life and your view of your *sisters and brothers*. How could your actions change if you viewed your sister/brother as yourself?

Love and Marriage

1. Pg.31 Par. 1 - *God does not love because human creatures have value. Rather, it is in loving human creatures that God gives them value.*  
Have you ever heard these statements? If you loved God, you wouldn't behave that way... You've disobeyed one of God's rules and you should feel ashamed of yourselves. You won't get into heaven unless you repent for your sins...In the past, the church has used a negative guilt motivation to manipulate behaviour. In some way, you have let God down. What does Peter Short's sentence say about this kind of motivation?

2. Pg. 31 Par. 2 - *This is why the Gospel of John says that the Word became a living being, not that the Word became words. (John 1:14 - The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.)*  
How have you experienced the Living Word as you have read Scripture?
3. Pg. 31 Par. 2 - *It is never legitimate to use Scripture to promote a loveless agenda.*  
What is a loving agenda? How has Scripture been used to promote a loveless agenda?
4. Pg. 32 Par. 6 - *The moral issue is our will to love one another. Beneath that moral issue lies the foundational demand to recognize the humanity of one another. The great enemy of truly moral love is not sex but fear.* How is fear the enemy of moral love?

### The Rising

1. Pg.36 Par 2 *Do you ever wonder...*  
What is your personal understanding of the meaning of resurrection? When does the resurrection occur? Is there a moment in your life when you consider that you were “resurrected”?
2. Pg.37 Par 2 *Nonetheless, some enchanted evening...*  
There are essentially two emotions, fear and love. What is the purpose of the rising in relation to fear?
3. Pg.38 Par 3 *But here’s the thing: the women who first witnessed to the rising did not speak of delight. They spoke of being afraid... There will be a mortal struggle. Almighty Death. Almighty God.*  
Think of a struggle you have had - a struggle out of dark and into light. How did that struggle affect your faith - before, during, and after.
4. One of our previous ministers at Rideau Park, Rev. Don Frame, said that Good Friday was the most important day of the church year for him. What does Good Friday mean to you?
5. Pg. 41 Par 4 - *Trouble is, it makes a terrible difference if you don’t know you’ve been raised to life with Christ; if you are unaware of what God has given you...*  
Has the *Fear of life in a different world, God’s world, where even the stones cry out* prevented you from making a leap of faith into the arms of Love which wait to embrace and hold you forever? The leap is only a prayer away. Go for it!

## SECOND BOOK

### *Practice*

#### *A Genealogy of Transformation*

1. Pg.43 Par 2 *Disappointing as it is, life is surrounded by limits.*  
What are some of the limiting factors in your life?
2. Pg.44 Par 2 *And where there is no awareness of limits, there is no sense of the precious, no wonder, no gratitude.*  
Why is cultivating an attitude of gratitude beneficial to life's journey? What are you thankful for in your life?
3. Pg.44 Par 3 *In this sense, wonder is a sister to prayer, prayer being the art of paying attention.*  
Do you get a sense of wonder when you pray? How do you pray? Is there anything you'd like to change about your prayer practise? If yes, why and how can you make the desired change?
4. Pg.45 speaks about a Category 6 wildfire. Relate the action of the wildfire to the title of this chapter.
5. Pg.45 last sentence *They shared the tasks of feeding, clothing and sheltering one another in ways they had never experienced before.*  
In times of physical devastation, "community" happens - people concerned for people. How do we build community where there hasn't been a major crisis?
6. Pg.47 Par. 1 - *Heroes are important...*  
Who are your heroes? Why do you consider them heroes? *Last Par...* Who do you think of as being a generous person? What about them shows their generosity?

#### *Gin and Grape Juice*

1. This essay gives us the history of the use of grape juice in communion. It appears we have proud Methodist roots. What kinds of things is the United Church involved in today which will hopefully have a profound influence on society in the future?
2. Pg. 50 last par. John Wesley was just one man who saw the need for a major change in the society of the mid 1700s. This was a man who cared about the poor - about their well-being. He fought *against a government that took profit in human misery*. How does the government of today profit from human misery?

3. Pg. 52 Top par. *We drink the Lord's cup in grape juice because we remember the suffering and we are committed to work in the streets and in the halls of government for the people who suffer today, the beloved of God.*  
If you could choose one thing about which you would concentrate your efforts to make a more healthy (physically, spiritually, socially) society, what would you choose? Now, what are you going to do about it?

### Land of Love and Anger

1. Pg. 54 Par. 1 *Every life is a witness and every Christian life is a witness to the redeeming and reconciling love of God in Jesus Christ. This witness is the vocation of every Christian community whether in Barrie or Beirut, Jerusalem or Jonquière.* How is your life bearing witness to the redeeming and reconciling love of God in Jesus Christ? How is the life of our Christian community doing the same?
2. Pg. 54 Par. 3. *In the Middle East, much is devastating and much is inspiring. I am humbled before the inscrutable mystery of it: how the intractable problems of this land can be held in place by so much love and by so much anger.*  
Desmond Tutu says this: (in his book *God has a Dream*) *Perhaps only when we care about each other's dead can we truly learn to live in the same world together without our irrational prejudices and hatreds. Perhaps this will be possible when we eventually realize that God has no enemies, only family.* He goes on to say: *Forgiveness gives us the capacity to make a new start. That is the power, the rationale, of confession and forgiveness. It is to say, "I have fallen but I am not going to remain there. Please forgive me." And forgiveness is the grace by which you enable the other person to get up, and get up with dignity, to begin anew.* By what means can the philosophy of forgiveness be lived out in the political realm? How can we, individually and as community, be a vehicle for forgiveness in our world?
3. Pg. 55 Par. 1. *Who are we Canadians to criticize Israelis? We wrote the book on colonies. We've built great cities and vast farms on confiscated land and confined the former inhabitants to designated areas. We call them reserves. I recognize the anger in the Middle East because I see it at home.*  
Throughout history, people have thought that there isn't enough—that their life would be changed if they gave in, even a little bit. But this is a life of great abundance: *Ask and ye shall receive* says God. We are God's partners, and only we can fulfill God's dream for unity and joy on this earth. We have looked only at our own small dreams. Some regimes of the world feel that eradication of the "enemy" is the way to go...eradication of terrorism..by whatever means. How can we be instruments for God's vision of shalom? In what way is the Christian called to *extend God's kingdom of shalom-peace and wholeness—of justice, of goodness, of compassion, of caring, of sharing, of laughter, of joy, and of reconciliation* ? (Desmond Tutu)
4. Pg. 56 Last Par. *We must join and support groups of people—Jewish and Muslim, Aboriginal and Christian—who take the risk of conviviality.*  
Do you feel, as Peter Short feels, that we must join and support the above groups of people? What groups of people do you support?

**THIRD BOOK***Prophecy*Wild Roses

1. Pg. 67 First Par - *The eyes struggle to see but from the human point of view, God is so unlikely, so stunning, sometimes so unsightly and always so impossible.*  
What is it that you believe about God that is “unlikely” - that underlines the fact statement that God is “sometimes so unsightly and always so impossible”?
2. Pg. 68 Par. 4 - *Suppose you had to choose a title for your life and your work. Suppose you had to say in a phrase what it's like to be inside your skin and to live the struggle you live.*  
What would you entitle your life so far? Why?
3. Pg. 68 Par. 8 - *At the same time we know that the absence, for all its dread, is not new.*  
What do you think could be the causes for experiencing the absence of God in this life?
4. Pg. 69 Last Par. - *But I am saying that God is wild because that is the only clear way to convey that God is not domestic.*  
Do you believe that God is wild? Why?
5. Pg. 71 Last Par. - *We are in church because the community holds the faith and tells it and sings it when we cannot hold it and tell it and sing it for ourselves.*  
How does our faith community show it believes in the life changing power of God?
6. Pg. 73 Last 2 Pars. - P. Short tells where God might be present in the wildness. Is God absent or present for you?

Coming Home to Africa

1. Pg. 59 Par. 1 *I am impressed by the vitality of the congregation*  
What is the reason for the congregation's vitality? Why is faith so vital to the Angolans?
2. Pg. 59 Par. 3 *Hundreds of thousands of people have left their homes in the rural areas, seeking safety from the wars that have destroyed this country for a generation. Their fields back home are sown with landmines; tanks have torn up the immensely beautiful countryside.*  
Imagine your home being invaded and your property and security ripped from you and your family. How do you see your faith as helping you to cope with this life challenge?
3. Pg. 61 Par. 4 *I will spend the rest of the visit, and the months and years ahead, trying to recognize home in the unfamiliar faces, unknown languages and cityscapes.*  
In what way does the example of Jesus' life help us to recognize home in the unfamiliar faces?
4. Pg. 61 Par. 5 Peter Short asks *Why do people come and fill up the churches?*  
Do you think the responses people gave him are similar to the responses people who attend church in Canada would offer? Why do you come to church?

5. Pg. 64 Par. 5 *Paul says that Jesus received the name above every other name because in his humble obedience to God's way, he made it to the bottom of human experience.*  
Jesus took the values of the day and spent his life challenging them. What would you have to change in your life to follow in Jesus' footsteps?

### Dear George

1. Pg. 75 Last Par. *I wonder what vision glorious your heart was seeing as you sang with the great crowd.*  
What is your vision glorious for the United Church of Canada? Is it similar to that of Peter Short?
2. Pg. 76 Par. 2 *Even today, some of us understand evangelism as calling people to participate in building God's reign of social justice on earth. Some of us, on the other hand, understand evangelism as calling people to new birth in faith, thus building a better society one human life at a time.*  
Which of these two understandings of evangelism speaks to who you are? Why?
3. Pg. 77 Par. 1 *Revival of religion is a hard word to hear today, given our reduced prospects. Hard, and hopeful. Is revival of religion a part of the vision glorious, too?*  
If you feel that a revival of religion is part of the vision glorious. How do you suggest we go about it?
4. Pg. 80 Par. 2 *"You can't always make a great work of art but you can always be one."*  
How can we, as members of this study group, be a work of art to our own community?
5. Pg. 81 Par. 2 *It requires an essential attitude of respect and a responsibility to live out of our common humanity. He have so much to learn about the unity of the body in which each has an honoured place, to which each contributes and to which all belong.*  
Jesus Christ was about respecting people, challenging their beliefs, and teaching people about God. What were Jesus' main messages to his community?

### God is in the Building

1. Pg. 84 Par. 2 - *I can give up a lot but don't ask me to forego my guilt. I'd rather hold on to it than fall into the hands of forgiveness.* It is said that the greatest fear is the fear of Love. What would Love require you to give up about yourself?
2. Pg. 85 - Par. 2 - *...But inevitably it makes me sick to do so—sick of what I become when I try to fill God's place with strategic manoeuvres or even with my own best self.*  
Christ requires a lot of his followers. We are confronted throughout our lifetime with our character flaws, and association with our demanding ego. Christ calls us away from the temporal into the Holy. The fire of the Holy Spirit is God's helper in refining and purging us of our uncleanness. *Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow, Lord, cleanse me from all of my sin. (Psalm 51:7)* Since the time that you offered yourself to God, how have you seen yourself being cleansed by God's grace?

3. Pg. 87 - Last Par. - *I think perhaps I'll go into the kitchen to see who's at the table and what's on the stove.*  
What do you do to find God? Where are you and God most at home together?

Conclusion

Pg. 91 Last Par - *Any life can be a victory and will be a victory when it is lived in Christ. This is the terrible mystery that will drive you out into the wilderness. It is the same mystery that will lead you home.*

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Believe this with all of your heart and enter into God's gates with a thankful heart and a willing soul. Your life will be transformed into a work of art.

How will you offer yourself in a new way to meet the Wisdom of Christ in the days ahead?