

# READING GROUP GUIDE

If your reading group of 7 or more members is interested in having William Sirls call in for a book discussion, please contact him through his website: [www.WilliamSirls.com](http://www.WilliamSirls.com).

1. In chapter 2, Kenneth hands Carla an apple and asks her what would happen to it if it had a big worm inside of it. What do the apple and worm represent?
2. Early in the book, Zach Norman calls God a bully. If God allows something bad to happen, does that mean it is part of God's will? Why?
3. Pastor Jim encourages his congregation to spend less time worrying about what they don't have, and just be thankful for what they do have. Do you find yourself doing this? What has God given you that you are most thankful for?
4. Do you know anyone that harbors ill will toward someone who has harmed them? How would you help someone forgive another human being? Is it possible that sometimes we forgive others to let ourselves off the hook?
5. Pastor Jim explains to Brooke that God doesn't keep us from tests and trials, but he helps us get through them. What are your thoughts on this?
6. At what point do you think Zach Norman knew he had faith? Why? Can you describe the moment you knew you had it?
7. If we pray for something and it doesn't happen, does that make the prayer unanswered?

8. What lesson did Macey Lewis need to learn?
9. Do you believe that God smiles when we use the unique gifts or abilities that he has given us? Take a few minutes and think about what your gift or gifts may be. Are you putting your gift to use? How do you feel when you do?
10. How could God make something good come from the death of a child?
11. Who is the old man with the beard?
12. Who is Kenneth to you?
13. In the epilogue, who are the three visitors that Tim Shempner's grandmother encounters? Are they anywhere else in the book?
14. Who do you believe is the main character in the book? Why?

## ‡ AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM SIRLS

**THOMAS NELSON:** This is your first novel. What was the rockiest section of road on this publishing journey?

**WILLIAM SIRLS:** Beyond the normal bumps in the road, writing this story was an incredible learning experience, as well as a lot of fun. Even though I'm getting better, something I have wrestled with my whole life is patience, so if I had to pick something about this particular journey that I struggled with, it would have to be the initial delay in the story's release as we transitioned it from a self-published galley to where the book is now. When we were first contacted by Thomas Nelson in the summer of 2011, we were only a couple months away from releasing the original version of *The Reason*. I was pretty excited about some of the feedback we had received from advance readers and was really anxious to get the book out there. At the time, postponing it for a year seemed like an eternity, but it went by quickly and I'm really glad we waited.

**TN:** Do any of the characters in the book closely resemble you?

**WS:** I would say Zach Norman because we both spent

a great deal of our lives worried about the wrong things. We both had the big house, the big car, the big job, and it wasn't until we were each in our forties that we realized that even though an incredible price was paid for it, the most valuable thing any of us could ever have is absolutely free—and that is a relationship with God. Zach just happened to discover this in a cemetery. I was in federal prison.

**TN:** How have your past experiences played a role in the telling of this story?

**WS:** I remember how different the world looked to me that golden moment when I knew I had faith. To me, faith is that absolute sense of certainty that God is who He says He is, that He is going to do what He says He is going to do, and that even guys like me had access to that through His Son, who died for all of us. Through my faith and the faith of others, I began to learn valuable lessons involving forgiveness, understanding, patience, and grace. It became important to me that I share some of these things that I learned, so I figured what better way to do that than to sprinkle them among the characters in the book.

**TN:** Do you have a favorite character?

**WS:** That's kind of like asking me to pick a favorite child. I kind of like them all, but again, I'm a huge fan of the author. If nobody was listening, I would say Zach Norman. If God can turn around guys like me and Zach, He can turn anyone around.

**TN:** If you had one piece of advice for someone out there struggling with grief, what would it be?

**WS:** God doesn't keep us from tests and trials. He helps us get through them. Ask Him for comfort and guidance and let your reaction to adversity be such a demonstration of strength and faith that it draws others to His kingdom.

**TN:** Who is Kenneth?

**WS:** Kenneth is an instrument of God's glory. I've heard readers call him an angel, a prophet, Jesus, and even God himself. One of them is correct.

**TN:** Does the phrase "Only believe" have any personal significance to you?

**WS:** Even though I always had the time, prison gave me more of it to pray, read the Bible, and experience fellowship with other Christians. It also taught me to be more patient and watch what happened when I did these things. It really opened my eyes to who I was. Prior to that, I had always allowed an internal competition between logic and faith. I was the type who constantly tried to pin things down I didn't understand. In all of my efforts to create different arguments to either prove or disprove different aspects of Christianity, I always came back to the irrefutable truth that we are simply incapable of understanding it all. At some point, we have to let go and make a conscious decision to either believe or not. It's a pretty important choice. So does the phrase "Only believe" have any personal significance to me? My answer is yes. When it's all said and done, I think we will find that everything else, in fact, is pretty insignificant.

**TN:** Is there anything else you'd like readers to know about this story?

**WS:** I would like them to only believe that everything in this book could happen.