

Hello Book Lovers! We will meet at Ascension in the Upper Fellowship Hall on Wednesday, June 20th, at 7 p.m. A discussion guide for our first selection appears below.

Ascension Book Club Discussion Questions June 20th – *Gilead*, by Marilynne Robinson

Don't feel obligated to answer these questions. Use whichever ones may be helpful. Most importantly, bring your own questions and reactions!

1. How long did it take you to get a picture of the Reverend John Ames and his situation in life?
2. What did you think of the Reverend Ames? On p. 118 he notes that his old friend Boughton had not stood in a pulpit in ten years and had completed his errand. Ames thinks he hasn't yet completed his own errand, but hopes that he's not 'presuming on the Lord's impatience.' Is he? Is he overstaying himself?

3. Near the end of the book, Ames writes:

'I love this town. I think sometimes of going into the ground here as a last wild gesture of love—I too will smolder away the time until the great and general incandescence.'

Elsewhere, i.e. p. 72, Ames again uses the word "smoldering": 'it was that night as if the earth were smoldering. Well, it was, and it is.'

Elsewhere, e.g. pp. 66-67 Ames also again uses the word "incandescence": 'When people come to speak to me, whatever they say, I am struck by a kind of incandescence in them. . . '

What do you make of that kind of language and imagery as it related to themes of death and hope?

4. How might you describe Ames's attitude toward this world as it relates to the next? Consider, for example, pp. 56-57, beginning with 'I have been thinking about existence lately' and ending with 'and I think piety forbids me to try.' Or, in more personal terms, consider the last paragraph that begins on p. 66, with 'This morning I have been trying to think about heaven. . . '

5. What other words, besides "smoldering" and "incandescence", did Ames like to use?

6. A great "chasm" had opened up between Ames's father and grandfather. What was the cause of it? And what do you make of the wild-eyed old grandfather?

7. Why do you suppose 'the biscuit fragment with ash on it, from his father's hand' was so memorable to Ames?

8. Do you think that John Ames (Jack) Boughton is a threat to Reverend Ames's wife and son?

9. Why do you think Jack turned out to be the way he is? Do you think he will change?

10. How well do you think that Ames understands Jack?

11. What is/are your favorite passage or passages in *Gilead*?

12. The sequel to *Gilead* is entitled *Home*, and it is largely about Jack Boughton. The sequel to it is entitled *Lila*, and it is about Reverend Ames wife. Any guesses as to what they have to say?

12. Did you find *Gilead* to be an accessible book? What do you think of Robinson's style?