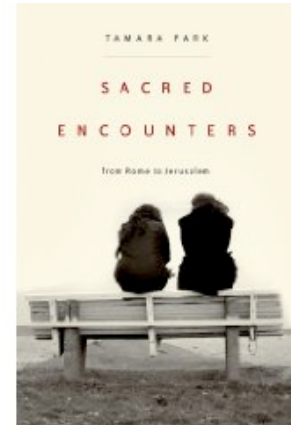


# Sacred Encounters from Rome to Jerusalem

## Discussion Guide



### A VISION FOR BANTER

The act of listening to and learning from others emerges as one of the most pronounced storylines of *Sacred Encounters*. Park's view of the world—and of God—gets expanded and enriched in simple and even serendipitous exchanges with those different from her. The hope is that a discussion of *Sacred Encounters* will also promote such robust and stretching exchanges.

The following are questions that can be used with a few friends, a book club or discussion group.

### EXPLORING YOUR STORY

What events in your life have caused you to rethink your understanding of God or cause you to question if God exists?

What personal experiences or world-events have caused you to reevaluate your understanding of another culture?

If a stranger asked you to describe God, do you think you would? What would you say? Would you feel comfortable asking a stranger in your city to describe God?

Park describes the “god of her gut” as who she assumes God really is, especially when circumstances turn challenging and life feels unruly. If you were to describe God from your most gut-honest place, what would you say? How does that gut-view of God differ from how you'd typically describe God?

Park struggles with her relationship with conflict, having a limited vocabulary for anger. How do you handle personal conflict? How does your relationship with conflict affect your spiritual journey?

Bill, the Greek Orthodox student priest from Meteora, said, “The book of theology is written in art.” What is a work of art that helps you better understand God or your faith?

Do you believe God desires a personal relationship with humanity? Why or why not?

Do you believe there's a universal quest for God? If so, is it motivated internally or constructed by cultures? Why or why not?

After reading *Sacred Encounters* did your description of God change? If so, how?

How do you understand grace?

Tamara struggled throughout the journey to be on even footing with others—and with God. She didn't want to owe anyone anything nor did she intend to be ripped off. However, the generosity of strangers up-ended her sense of equilibrium and ultimately revealed a deeper truth about God. There was no way she could pay God back for his extravagant love and generosity showed to her through Jesus. No way. She simply had to receive grace, to accept.

Does receiving grace come easily for you? Why or why not? Do you agree that God offers grace? Why or why not? How would you describe grace?

What does your search for God look like?

While Tamara thought she was on this great pursuit of God in the end she discovered that God was pursuing her; and doing so in ways specific to her soul (travel and conversations). What are ways that you pursue getting to know God? What are means and/or experiences that indicate that God is pursuing you? What is the specific language of your soul?

## **SEEING YOUR STORY IN LIGHT OF THE LARGER CULTURE**

How do you think your cultural background influences your description of God?

Do you feel like your understanding of God or your form of faith is shared by the majority of the American population, or would you consider yourself in the minority? How do you think that affects your faith?

Is your approach to spirituality predominately private or communal?

What relationship, if any, should there be between the religious community and the state?

## **CONSIDERING OTHERS**

As Park began her journey she laid out her assumptions—ultimately her prejudices—regarding other traditions and faiths. How about you—what were your assumptions about other traditions and faiths as you began to read this book? How were your assumptions challenged along the way as you read about other faiths and cultures?

Park's assumption about Greek Orthodox clashed against Bill's perception of Protestants. Why do you think there are so many religious/theological misunderstandings?

Eric describes "liminal space" as space of interchange where people relate with others on the same level free from hierarchy. Where do you experience liminal space? What is your sacred bench? Is there a place in your city that provides you and others opportunities for exchange?

## **CONSIDERING THE SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL STORY OF YOUR CITY**

What is your city's history of prejudice (religious, ethnic or other)? How would you characterize your city when it comes to different perspectives (i.e. tolerant or close-minded)?

Park said that if Charlotte had to choose its own deity like the ancient Athenians did it would be money. What do you think would be the deity for your city?

What is your hope for your city in regards to spiritual and cultural exchanges?

For an additional *Sacred Encounters* Discussion Guide go to: <http://www.neueministry.com/2009/02/6281/> (you can download the guide for free, you simply need to register on the site).