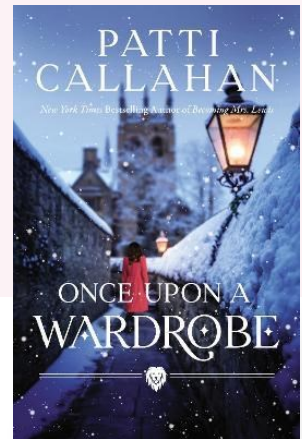




# LEADER'S GUIDE

## ONCE UPON A WARDROBE BY PATTI CALLAHAN



*"I know you think the whole world is held together by some math formula... But I've thought about this a lot, and I think the world is held together by stories."*

**GEORGE DEVONSHIRE**

### THEMES

Stories

Journeys

Terminal Illness

Faith

Hope

Imagination

Beginnings

### HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Death

### CHARACTERS

George Devonshire is an 8-year-old boy with a weak heart that cannot keep him alive. He is not fearful of dying, and stories and his love for his sister Megs, have given him something to live for. George spends his days in his bedroom, curled up with enchanting books, and though his life is fading, Aslan – the magnificent lion from Narnia – breathes fresh hope into his soul. George's new quest and mission to accomplish before he dies, is to learn where Aslan and Narnia came from before it's too late.

Margaret Devonshire (Megs) is George's older sister, and in many ways, his complete opposite. While George comes alive through stories and wonder, Megs' heart "belongs to numbers and equations" (p5). Megs soon discovers there are wonders in the world that cannot be explained through science and math, and there is no equation to solve every situation. While conversing with C. S. Lewis, Megs begins to realise stories are a gift which can direct the gaze and heart of the most unlikely soul towards true hope.

Padraig Cavendar is an English Literature student whose life has been shaped by stories. Unlike Megs, he believes stories have their own truths and relishes tales for the young and old – believing you're never too

old for a fantastic fairy-tale. Padraig is not unsympathetic towards Megs and her straightforward personality as his father is very much the same and teaches Math and Sciences at the university.

Mr C. S. Lewis (Jack) is "the grandest kind of storyteller" (p74), and has a compassionate heart towards children and those seeking the truth and hope that his allegorical Narnia tales point toward.

Warnie (the Major) is Jack's brother. He has a tender heart that is somewhat damaged after the war and lives a quiet life. He and Jack welcome Megs into their home as Jack shares their history and grand coming of age stories, in hopes of answering the seemingly unanswerable question of where Narnia came from.

## STORYLINE

'Once Upon a Wardrobe' is an enchanting story about a sick little boy, his doting older sister, the marvellous C. S. Lewis, and a captivating journey to pursue the origins of Narnia.

George Devonshire is a terminally sick little boy whose heart desires to seek and find the truth about where his beloved Narnia came from. Being bedridden, George seeks adventure through his cherished books and falls in love with the magical Narnia and the fierce lion Aslan. George's older sister Megs attends a local university nearby where C. S. Lewis is teaching, and George petitions her to seek him out and discover where Narnia came from. As Megs gathers the courage to speak with Lewis and ask him the questions George has begged her to find the answers to, an unlikely friendship between them blossoms. Lewis – who knows not the exact origin of Narnia – delves into exploring his past with Megs, sharing profound stories from his childhood. Although not all of Lewis's memories are happy ones, each memory ultimately weaves together a bigger story and captures a glimpse of something magical, something of Narnia, something of the true hope we all have access to.

Initially, this journey for Megs is incredibly frustrating – she simply wants a straightforward answer to the question, "Where did Narnia come from?". However, Megs soon realises that not everything is easily explained away by a math equation, and she is transformed within. She begins to understand and appreciate beauty as she embraces the good gift of stories and hope. She falls in love with Padraig, who embraces little George and helps his dreams of visiting Dunluce Castle (Jack's Cair Paravel) become a reality before George embarks on his next adventure after leaving this world.

When George is gone, Megs is lovingly surrounded by her new friends Jack and Warnie, and savours her newfound love with Padraig. Although her heart is broken, she now has a hope and something outside herself to find comfort within.

As the novel wraps up, we're given a glimpse into Megs' beautiful future with Padraig, where Narnia and George's drawings of Aslan are passed along to their grandchildren, who, in turn, embrace the magic and wonder Narnia has to offer.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. What did you find most enchanting about 'Once Upon A Wardrobe'? Discuss.

### TALKING POINTS

As a group, discuss your favourite part of the story. Answers may vary and include;

- Jack and his childhood reminiscing.
- Megs' journey to becoming a young woman who appreciates the power of stories.
- George and his love for Narnia.
- Megs' and Padraigs blossoming romance.
- Jack and Megs' friendship.
- Padraig, Meg and Georges visit to the castle.
- The ending.

2

Q. Megs describes herself as a person whose "heart belongs to numbers and equations" (p5). Are you a numbers and 'facts' person, or do you naturally embrace the more 'magical' side of life?

### TALKING POINTS

We don't always fit into one category of a 'stories' person or a 'numbers' person, but more often than not, we do tend to gravitate towards one or the other;

- "At the start of the novel, Megs Devonshire doesn't much care for made up stories... Why do you think her heart changed? Have you felt the same way? What stories have changed you?" (p283).
- God intentionally created us and our unique personalities; He has a purpose for every person, and no personality type is 'better' than another – they are all essential and valuable in the Kingdom of God.

3

Q. On page 100, Megs says, "He just tells tales of his life, and when I leave, somehow I know more about the world and my own life." Why is sharing our testimony and life stories so important?

### TALKING POINTS

We need a variety of 'real-life stories' to encourage us, to spur us on in our race, and to draw those who are wondering closer to the Lord;

- Testimonies and true stories of all kinds encourage us, show us God's mercy and grace, and display God's transforming power in a person's life.
- Overall, they show the loving-kindness of God and His desire to save people through His son Jesus.

# 4

Q. On page 62, Jack's mother says, "A person doesn't have to be only one thing in the world. You can be more." Have you often limited yourself to 'one thing'? What are some of the many roles you have? Which one do you - or others - tend to use to define you?

## TALKING POINTS

Some of the many 'roles' we may have include;

- Follower of Jesus – child of God (the only one we ought to define ourselves by).
- Wife, mother, sister, daughter, friend.
- Homeschool mother/ Homemaker.
- Career Woman (Teacher, Nurse, Doctor, Assistant, Chief – whichever your career may have).
- Unemployed.
- Missionary or ministry focused.

# 5

Q. On page 120, we learn that the very first book Jack saved up his money to buy was 'Siegfried and the Twilight of the Gods'. Can you remember the first book you deeply desired or cherished?

## TALKING POINTS

There are infinite ways to fall in love with books, and a book lover rarely forgets the first book which impacted them. Books may be special to us for many reasons, some being;

- A childhood book which was read to us by someone special (a mother, father, grandparents or friends).
- The first book we read from start to finish alone without help.
- The first book which captured our imagination.
- The first book which we read alongside others we loved (in school or as a book club).
- The first book we saved our money to buy.
- A special book gifted to us.

# 6

Q. "Do you think you choose these life-changing books, or do they choose you?" (Megs, p 154). What do you think?

## TALKING POINTS

"A book girl is story formed, shaped in her very concept of self by the characters she has encountered on the written page, by the narratives that teach her what it means to be a woman." – Sarah Clarkson, Book Girl p 66.

How intentional are you with choosing the books that you read? Do you often experience the "this is just the book I needed right now", moment? (the following dot points are paraphrased from Book Girl by Sarah Clarkson, p 69)

- As we wrestle with important questions such as; Who am I? Who should I be? What does it mean to live and love? What does it mean to be a woman? We can find encouraging and truthful answers in the lives of the noble, honest, and pure characters we read about in our cherished books.
- Good books reveal what it looks like to be good, evil, brave, cowardly, happy, or tragic.
- Good books take hold of us, filling us with the capacity to learn, dream, think, and shape our world around us.

# 7

Q. When Megs is trying to discover the person behind the 'White Witch', Mr Lewis responds with, "don't we all know the White Witch? Must she be someone in particular? We can try and find the source, but we are all born knowing the Witch, aren't we?" (p215). Discuss.

## TALKING POINTS

The 'White Witch' represents all that is unholy and wicked in the world, we cannot avoid her in this life, but God's supernatural peace and joy comes and fills our heavy hearts during this time. He has a good plan to turn what the enemy meant for evil into good;

- Praying scripture can help us experience peace and draw nearer to the Lord.
- We must first think of God's perfect love for us, then consider our circumstances so we do not begin to question His perfect love.
- God is worthy to be praised in all circumstances, *not for all circumstances*, but in them.
- Trials and suffering can strengthen our character and confident hope of salvation (Romans 5: 3-5).
- Our suffering may encourage others, shine Christ's light and role model the Christian faith and endurance to others.
- On the other side of our suffering, we may have some perspective and understanding we did not have during the suffering.
- What has happened to us may have helped to advance the Gospel and save one (or many) for Christ, just as it did in Jack's life.
- Our pain and trials in life can truly bless and help others overcome their suffering through shared experience, advice, and comfort.
- God works all things together for the good of those who love Him.

# 8

Q. On page 218, Mr Lewis says, "Megs, every human interaction is eternally important." How has this quote reminded you to live out and share your faith with others in everyday situations?

## TALKING POINTS

Points to consider while discussing this question;

- Sharing the Gospel is about so much more than just our words; our lives, acts of kindness, and role modelling of the Christian faith can often speak much louder than our words and are a fantastic method of sharing the Gospel.

How can we feel more prepared to share the Gospel?

- Follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit.
- Pray for guidance as we speak or share.
- Pray for opportunities to share our faith, expecting that the Lord will equip us and bless our words as they reflect Him and His story.
- Understand what we believe and read our Bible regularly.
- Memorise and refer to scriptures such as 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 to help you share the gospel message succinctly.

# 9

Q. On page 266, Megs' says, "Grief is the price I paid for loving fiercely". Can you share a time in your life when you've experienced grief?

## TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- Times of suffering; poor health, terminal diagnosis, loss of loved ones.
- Times of trial; wayward child, enduring persecution because of your faith, relationship breakdown.
- Times of discouragement or confusion; job/career loss, failure, disappointment.
- Times of exhaustion; early days of motherhood, burnout, overcommitments.

# 10

Q. "The hints had always been right in front of his eyes and his heart. The stories that thrilled him were echoes of the world that waited for him" (p271). Great stories direct our hearts and gaze to the greatest story ever told. Since reading 'Once Upon a Wardrobe', have you begun to find echoes of God's great story among the stories you've read or heard?

## TALKING POINTS

Things to consider while discussing this question;

- The Bible is the only true story.
- "Even Boxen wasn't something to believe in. It was something that brought a feeling of joy" (p123). Although many stories may point us towards God, it's important to remember that the Bible is the only story to believe in.
- Stories can be beautiful, wholesome, captivating and worthwhile. Still, we must always prioritise reading the Word of God above all else and keep all other stories in their proper place (not on a pedestal or as an idol in our hearts).
- We must remember not to confuse the truth of our God with fiction, myth and false gods.
- "Education is the science of relation" (Charlotte Mason). Many pagan myths and legends (for example, the Norse Mythology Lewis was so fond of) contain echoes of the one true story which gives us real hope for our future.
- Great stories where good battles evil and overcomes remind us of the very real happily ever after for those safe in Christ.



## ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR LEADERS

The author provides discussion questions at the end of the book. You may like to encourage your book club sisters to keep a journal and answer these questions so you can discuss the book in further detail together.

-----  
**Disclaimer:** Thanks for supporting this essential ministry impacting the lives of women the world over! We pray that our Heavenly Father blesses both you and the women you lead. This Leader's Guide has been prepared by Blossoming through Books and is protected by copyright law. Please seek express permission from Blossoming through Books before making copies by contacting [blossomingthroughbooks@gmail.com](mailto:blossomingthroughbooks@gmail.com). Please share your experience and feedback with us! This Bookclub Kit was edited by Blossoming through Books team member Colette Plaska.