

The 52 Book Cafe

Read one book each week, follow the order or begin where the question speaks to you—and let every book leave you with a question worth carrying into your own life.

I. HOW TO BE HUMAN

Goodness, the Other, and the Human Life

Before we ask what to achieve or become, we begin with something more fundamental: **how do we become human—and how do we learn to live well with others?**

1. Iris Murdoch — *The Sovereignty of Good* / *De soevereiniteit van het goede*

Can becoming a better person begin simply by learning to see reality—and other people—more truthfully?

2. Martin Buber — *I and Thou* / *Ik en Jij*

What changes when we stop treating another person as an object and begin to encounter them as a genuine "Thou"?

3. Emmanuel Levinas — *Ethics and Infinity* / *Ethiek en oneindigheid*

Are we responsible for another person before we have even chosen to be?

4. Simone Weil — *Gravity and Grace* / *Zwaarte en genade*

What if truly paying attention were one of the deepest forms of love?

5. Josef Pieper — *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* / *Vrije tijd als grondslag van de cultuur*

Have we become so busy producing that we have forgotten how to simply be?

6. Charles Taylor — *The Ethics of Authenticity* / *De malaise van de moderniteit*

What does it really mean to "be yourself"?

II. THE HUMAN BEING IN SOCIETY

Work, Technology, and the World We Have Built

We are shaped not only by our personal choices, but also by the society, technology, and systems around us. **Are we building our world—or is our world quietly building us?**

7. Hannah Arendt — *The Human Condition* / *De menselijke conditie*

What happens when work and productivity become more important than reflection and shared life?

8. Martin Heidegger — *The Question Concerning Technology* / *De vraag naar de techniek*

Do we control technology—or does it change the way we see the world and ourselves?

9. Byung-Chul Han — *The Burnout Society* / *De vermoeide samenleving*

What if the person exploiting you is no longer your boss—but yourself?

10. Mark Fisher — *Capitalist Realism* / *Kapitalistisch realisme: is er geen alternatief?*

Can we still imagine a world fundamentally different from the one we live in?

III. POWER, IMAGE, AND SYSTEMS

Seeing What Usually Remains Invisible

Images, institutions, language, and culture shape what we believe to be natural. **What stories are we living inside without even realizing it?**

11. Walter Benjamin — *Illuminations* / *Illuminations*

What do we lose—and gain—when art and culture can be endlessly reproduced?

12. Roland Barthes — *Mythologies* / *Mythologieën*

Which ideas seem "natural" only because we have been taught not to question them?

13. Michel Foucault — *Discipline and Punish* / *Discipline, toezicht en straf: de geboorte van de gevangenis*

How does power shape us most effectively when we no longer notice that it is there?

14. Theodor W. Adorno — *Minima Moralia* / *Minima Moralia: reflecties uit het beschadigde leven*

How do we live a good life when the world itself often makes goodness difficult?

15. Gilles Deleuze — *Negotiations* / *Negotiations*

What if freedom is not about discovering who you are—but continually becoming?

16. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari — *What Is Philosophy? / Wat is filosofie?*

Is philosophy about finding answers—or creating new ways of thinking?

IV. LIVING YOUR OWN LIFE

Listening for Your Own Voice

After looking at the world around us, we turn inward. **Is this really my life—and what would it mean to live it more fully?**

17. Rainer Maria Rilke — *Letters to a Young Poet / Brieven aan een jonge dichter*

What if you do not need to solve your biggest questions yet—but simply learn to live with them?

18. Parker J. Palmer — *Let Your Life Speak*

What if you stopped forcing your life into a plan and started listening to what it is trying to tell you?

19. David Whyte — *The Three Marriages*

What relationships deserve your deepest commitment?

20. Oliver Burkeman — *Four Thousand Weeks / 4000 weken*

If you cannot do everything, how do you decide what is truly worth doing?

21. Pico Iyer — *The Art of Stillness*

What might you discover if you stopped moving long enough to notice where you are?

22. Katherine May — *Wintering / Winteren*

What if difficult seasons are not failures—but necessary parts of life?

23. Leo Tolstoy — *The Death of Ivan Ilyich / De dood van Ivan Iljitsj*

What if it takes confronting death to realize that you have not yet truly lived?

24. Matt Haig — *The Midnight Library / Middernachtbibliotheek*

Would another life really have made you happier?

V. MEANING

When Life Becomes Difficult

There are moments when life cannot be fixed or controlled. **What remains possible when suffering enters the story?**

25. Paul Kalanithi — *When Breath Becomes Air* / *Als adem lucht wordt*

How do you live meaningfully when the future you imagined is suddenly no longer available?

26. Etty Hillesum — *An Interrupted Life* / *Het verstoorde leven*

Can we preserve our humanity when the world around us becomes inhuman?

27. George Saunders — *Lincoln in the Bardo* / *Lincoln in de bardo*

What happens when grief refuses to let us move forward?

VI. THE COURAGE TO LIVE

Choosing Life Again

Courage is not always dramatic. Sometimes it means taking one more step, beginning again, or choosing a different life. **What would happen if you dared to move?**

28. Rachel Joyce — *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* / *De onwaarschijnlijke reis van Harold Fry*

Can one small decision change the direction of an entire life?

29. L.M. Montgomery — *The Blue Castle*

What would you do differently if you stopped living according to other people's expectations?

30. Becky Chambers — *A Psalm for the Wild-Built*

If you did not have to prove your usefulness, what would make your life worth living?

31. Susanna Clarke — *Piranesi*

How do you know who you are when memory and reality can no longer be trusted?

32. Lois Lowry — *The Giver*

Would a painless society be worth the price of giving up freedom and feeling?

VII. GOODNESS, COMPASSION, AND LIGHT

What We Give to One Another

Goodness is often quiet. It appears in forgiveness, honesty, attention, and the decision not to look away. **How can one person bring more light into another person's life?**

33. Henri Nouwen — *The Return of the Prodigal Son / Eindelijk thuis*

Can we become not only someone who needs forgiveness, but someone capable of giving it?

34. Frederick Buechner — *Telling Secrets*

What happens when we finally tell the truth about the stories that shaped us?

35. Marilynne Robinson — *Gilead*

Can an ordinary life become extraordinary through attention and love?

36. Claire Keegan — *Small Things Like These / Dit soort kleinigheden*

What responsibility do we have when we see something wrong?

VIII. ORDINARY LIFE THAT TURNS OUT TO BE EXTRAORDINARY

The Beauty of Paying Attention

Not every meaningful life has a dramatic plot. **What if the extraordinary has been hiding inside ordinary life all along?**

37. James Herriot — *All Creatures Great and Small / Alle schepselen groot en klein*

Can a meaningful life be built through daily work, care, humour, and connection?

38. Tove Jansson — *The Summer Book / Het zomerboek*

What can we learn from the moments we usually think are too ordinary to remember?

39. Kent Haruf — *Plainsong*

What can happen when people simply begin to show up for one another?

40. Ann Patchett — *Tom Lake*

How do the stories we tell about our past change over time?

41. Elizabeth Strout — *Olive Kitteridge*

Can we ever fully understand another person—or ourselves?

IX. THE ORDINARY PERSON AND SMALL ACTS OF HEROISM

You Do Not Have to Be Extraordinary to Matter

Heroes are not always extraordinary people. Sometimes they simply choose kindness, courage, or persistence. **Could an ordinary person change someone's world?**

42. Winston Groom — *Forrest Gump*

What if wisdom does not always come from being the smartest person in the room?

43. R.J. Palacio — *Wonder*

What would change if we chose to see the world from another person's side?

44. Shelby Van Pelt — *Remarkably Bright Creatures / Opmerkelijk slimme wezens*

Can unexpected connections help us rediscover parts of ourselves we thought were lost?

45. Amor Towles — *A Gentleman in Moscow / Een gentleman in Moskou*

How much freedom can a person preserve when almost everything else has been taken away?

46. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry — *Wind, Sand and Stars / Wind, zand en sterren*

What do we discover about ourselves when we move beyond comfort?

X. MEMORY, HISTORY, AND LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

What We Carry Forward

We inherit stories, memories, wounds, and history—but we are not only what came before us. **How do we remember the darkness without allowing it to become the only story?**

47. Markus Zusak — *The Book Thief / De boekendief*

Can words save us—and can they also destroy us?

48. Khaled Hosseini — *The Kite Runner / De vliegeraar*

What does redemption require from us?

49. John Steinbeck — *East of Eden / Ten oosten van Eden*

Are we defined by what we inherit—or can we always choose differently?

XI. VOICE, WRITING, AND STORY

Who Gets to Speak?

The journey ends with the question of voice: who speaks, who is heard, who is silenced—and what happens when we find the courage to tell our own story?

50. Hélène Cixous — *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*

What must we be willing to risk in order to write something truly alive?

51. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak — *Can the Subaltern Speak?*

Is it possible to speak for another person without speaking over them?

52. Michael Oakeshott — *The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind*

What if human culture is not a search for one final truth, but an endless conversation between different voices?

Your next story begins with a question

Reading can help us discover new questions.

Explore the **Transformation Storytelling Game & Diary**—a set of storytelling tools designed to help you explore your own story, ask better questions, and imagine what comes next.

www.transformationstorytelling.nl