

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?**

Week 1 — 1–7 September 2026

1. Iris Murdoch — *The Sovereignty of Good*

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

Week 2 — 8–14 September 2026

2. Martin Buber — *I and Thou*

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

Week 3 — 15–21 September 2026

3. Emmanuel Levinas — *Ethics and Infinity*

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

Week 4 — 22–28 September 2026

4. Simone Weil — *Gravity and Grace*

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

Week 5 — 29 September–5 October 2026

5. Josef Pieper — *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*

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

Week 6 — 6–12 October 2026

6. Charles Taylor — *The Ethics of Authenticity*

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?**

Week 7 — 13–19 October 2026

7. Hannah Arendt — *The Human Condition*

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

Week 8 — 20–26 October 2026

8. Martin Heidegger — *The Question Concerning Technology*

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

Week 9 — 27 October–2 November 2026

9. Byung-Chul Han — *The Burnout Society*

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

Week 10 — 3–9 November 2026

10. Mark Fisher — *Capitalist Realism*

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?**

Week 11 — 10–16 November 2026

11. Walter Benjamin — *Illuminations*

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

Week 12 — 17–23 November 2026

12. Roland Barthes — *Mythologies*

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

Week 13 — 24–30 November 2026

13. Michel Foucault — *Discipline and Punish*

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

Week 14 — 1–7 December 2026

14. Theodor W. Adorno — *Minima Moralia*

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

Week 15 — 8–14 December 2026

15. Gilles Deleuze — *Negotiations*

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

Week 16 — 15–21 December 2026

16. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari — *What Is Philosophy?*

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?**

Week 17 — 22–28 December 2026

17. Rainer Maria Rilke — *Letters to a Young Poet*

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

Week 18 — 29 December 2026–4 January 2027

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?

Week 19 — 5–11 January 2027

19. David Whyte — *The Three Marriages*

What relationships deserve your deepest commitment?

Week 20 — 12–18 January 2027

20. Oliver Burkeman — *Four Thousand Weeks*

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

Week 21 — 19–25 January 2027

21. Pico Iyer — *The Art of Stillness*

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

Week 22 — 26 January–1 February 2027

22. Katherine May — *Wintering*

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

Week 23 — 2–8 February 2027

23. Leo Tolstoy — *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*

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

Week 24 — 9–15 February 2027

24. Matt Haig — *The Midnight Library*

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?**

Week 25 — 16–22 February 2027

25. Paul Kalanithi — *When Breath Becomes Air*

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

Week 26 — 23 February–1 March 2027

26. Etty Hillesum — *An Interrupted Life*

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

Week 27 — 2–8 March 2027

27. George Saunders — *Lincoln in the 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?**

Week 28 — 9–15 March 2027

28. Rachel Joyce — *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry*

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

Week 29 — 16–22 March 2027

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

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

Week 30 — 23–29 March 2027

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?

Week 31 — 30 March–5 April 2027

31. Susanna Clarke — *Piranesi*

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

Week 32 — 6–12 April 2027

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?

Week 33 — 13–19 April 2027

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

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

Week 34 — 20–26 April 2027

34. Frederick Buechner — *Telling Secrets*

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

Week 35 — 27 April–3 May 2027

35. Marilynne Robinson — *Gilead*

Can an ordinary life become extraordinary through attention and love?

Week 36 — 4–10 May 2027

36. Claire Keegan — *Small Things Like These*

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?**

Week 37 — 11–17 May 2027

37. James Herriot — *All Creatures Great and Small*

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

Week 38 — 18–24 May 2027

38. Tove Jansson — *The Summer Book*

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

Week 39 — 25–31 May 2027

39. Kent Haruf — *Plainsong*

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

Week 40 — 1–7 June 2027

40. Ann Patchett — *Tom Lake*

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

Week 41 — 8–14 June 2027

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?**

Week 42 — 15–21 June 2027

42. Winston Groom — *Forrest Gump*

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

Week 43 — 22–28 June 2027

43. R.J. Palacio — *Wonder*

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

Week 44 — 29 June–5 July 2027

44. Shelby Van Pelt — *Remarkably Bright Creatures*

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

Week 45 — 6–12 July 2027

45. Amor Towles — *A Gentleman in Moscow*

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

Week 46 — 13–19 July 2027

46. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry — *Wind, Sand and Stars*

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?**

Week 47 — 20–26 July 2027

47. Markus Zusak — *The Book Thief*

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

Week 48 — 27 July–2 August 2027

48. Khaled Hosseini — *The Kite Runner*

What does redemption require from us?

Week 49 — 3–9 August 2027

49. John Steinbeck — *East of 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?

Week 50 — 10–16 August 2027

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

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

Week 51 — 17–23 August 2027

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

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

Week 52 — 24–30 August 2027

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