

## READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

# *Grounded*

by

Diana Butler Bass

### INTRODUCTION

1. Diana Butler Bass says that there is a spiritual revolution happening in which the question “Who is God?” has evolved into the question “Where is God?” (p. 6). Have you seen or felt this change? Why does it matter?
2. Have you observed any of the changes Butler Bass points to? If so, in what ways does this book help you interpret these changes?
3. “To relocate God is to reground our lives” (p. 11). When you think of God, where do you assume God to be? Where did that idea come from? How might “relocating God” reground your life?

4. Butler Bass claims that today our experience of faith and meeting God is coming down off the mountain, meaning that we no longer find God only within the walls of the church. What are your thoughts about this? If you attend church, does it change anything about that experience? If you don't, how do you feel about faith being accessible around us, in the world and our neighbors?

## CHAPTER 1

### DIRT

1. Before reading this chapter, what were your thoughts on the connection between dirt and God?
2. Other than on Ash Wednesday, when are we reminded that “from living ground we were made; to living ground we will return” (p. 42)?
3. “At the same time that the earth is losing its soil, more people than ever are making their way back to the ground” (p. 46). Can you name churches or organizations in your city that are planting gardens and tending the earth?
4. Take time to reflect on theologian Sallie McFague’s question, “What if we saw the earth as part of the body of God, not as separate from God (who dwells elsewhere), but as the visible reality of the invisible God?” (p. 51). How does this deepen your understanding of God? Of the earth? Of their interconnection?

## CHAPTER 2

### WATER

1. “The place where water and land touch is one of the most significant geographies for our life on earth” (p. 68). What do you think Butler Bass imagines from both a scientific and a faith perspective when she describes this riparian zone?
2. “Ancient biblical tradition suggests that waters—wells, springs, oases—are also places of renewal, hospitality, and spiritual vision, where human beings see God and God’s blessing” (p. 73). What is your favorite water story from a sacred text? What role does water play in your faith tradition?
3. Butler Bass predicts that “our descendants will surely interpret the spirituality of water in starkly different ways than we do now” (p. 77). What examples do you know of in which faith communities are collectively addressing water shortage issues?
4. “This is a vibrant spiritual vision—knowing God as water is not only about clarity and flow, but consists in great part of the muddiness of our own lives” (p. 91). How has God come to life for you in flowing, still, and muddy waters?

## CHAPTER 3

### SKY

1. Read aloud the whole paragraph at the top of page 100 that begins, “The Psalmist’s words, ‘Our God is in the heavens,’ actually unveil far more complex spiritual possibilities. Unlike the ground and water, sky is beyond our comprehension.” How does Butler Bass’s lyrical writing serve the subject matter she is sharing?
2. “To say that God is in the sky is not to imply that God lives at a certain address above the earth. Instead, it is an invitation to consider God’s presence that both reaches to the stars and wafts through our lives as a spiritual breeze” (p. 103). How does this statement illustrate a shift from a vertical theology to a grounded sense of God among us?
3. Hildegard of Bingen wrote almost a thousand years ago, “If we fall in love with creation deeper and deeper, we will respond to its endangerment with passion” (p. 123). Today we see that numerous people (faith-based groups among them) are engaged in the largest social movement in human history, addressing issues of climate change. What do you make of this? What role could you play here?
4. “The ground is the earth’s body, water its lifeblood, and the atmosphere its lungs” (p. 114). How has this book helped you frame climate change from a faith perspective? What motivates and inspires you to face the crisis

and institute changes? How do you strike a balance between truth and hope?

## CHAPTER 4 ROOTS

1. “Honoring our ancestors is an obligation of faith” (p. 136). Was that a lesson you learned in your culture? Do you know much about your ancestors?
2. Butler Bass distinguishes between ancient times, when one lived among one’s ancestors, and modern times, when we can only partially piece together the stories of our ancestors. She points out that “if we do not know where we came from or where we are in a story, it is difficult to imagine that we can understand the meaning and purpose of our own lives” (p. 142). How are faith communities uniquely positioned to connect to and draw meaning from the past?
3. “Every family tree intersects with other family trees. Our roots are intertwined. We are all related to each other. We belong to each other” (p. 151). Have you thought about people being so interconnected, as Butler Bass suggests? What implications could this statement have for race relations, political parties, and church denominations?
4. Butler Bass quotes Archbishop Desmond Tutu as saying, “The first law of our being is that we are set in a delicate network of interdependence with our fellow human

beings and with the rest of God's creation" (p. 154). Do you see this belief proclaimed in our society? If so, how? If not, how can we work to make it happen?

## CHAPTER 5 HOME

1. Butler Bass makes many statements about home: Home is more than a house (p. 166). Home is the geography of our souls (p. 166). Home is a place where we belong (p. 167). Write for five to ten minutes, beginning with this prompt: "Home is ..." Or, if discussing in a group, give your definition of home.
2. "Our homes are a sort of spiritual training ground for what happens in our world house" (p. 183). What spiritual habits and lessons did you learn or teach at home that you have seen play out in the world?
3. "Christianity itself can be understood as a domestic revolution. The first churches recorded in the New Testament met in homes, often overseen by women" (p. 187). How are house churches both a very old global practice and a very new experiment?
4. "God is our home. God dwells with us and we in God" (p. 190). How did God's people find God and each other in the days before church homes (refer to p. 187)? How do they find one another now? If "home is an ongoing spiritual presence" (p. 191), what are we to do with that?

## CHAPTER 6 NEIGHBORHOOD

1. Early on, Butler Bass informs us that *neighbor* means “near dweller” (p. 196). Do you know many of your neighbors? Who are your neighbors, and what is your relationship with them? Who has been a neighbor to you in the wider sense of the word?
2. “Neighborhoods need spiritual gathering places as much as they need schools and shops. Yet God does not live at the neighborhood church” (p. 196). What do you think the role of the neighborhood church is, and what should it be?
3. Butler Bass brings up the idea of connecting with thousands of people daily via media and social media (p. 205). Do you live in technology neighborhoods? What are the challenges of those neighborhoods?
4. “The world can no longer afford tribes intent on purity who believe God blesses only them” (p. 220). How does Butler Bass distinguish among tribes, clans, and open tribes? Who might disagree with this statement?

## CHAPTER 7 COMMONS

1. “To find God here and now, we must look toward the commons” (p. 238). How does Butler Bass think religion needs to change from “me” to “we” for the revolu-

tion to thrive? What has been the church's role in the past, and what is its role in the future?

2. "When religion fails at compassion, it fails at its own test" (p. 259). How do you see religion succeeding, and then failing, at compassion?
3. "It is pretty simple, really. Unity, relationship, action" (p. 266). How could this be a mission statement for an individual or faith community? Would anything be lacking from the statement?
4. Where could you look to find examples of groups who are simultaneously thinking and acting globally and locally (p. 246)?

## CONCLUSION REVELATION

1. Throughout the book, Butler Bass has demonstrated an awareness of the connections we share with God and others here on earth. "What was once the vision of only a few has now become a theological revolution of many" (p. 271). If you asked "nones" and "dones" about their lives and choices, do you think they would see themselves as part of a spiritual revolution? Why or why not?
2. "The old God is fading from view. ... And a new God has risen over the horizon" (p. 277). After reading this book, what are your thoughts on that statement? How would you share that with friends, family, and people

who consider themselves spiritual or part of a faith community?

3. How does a church move from the past to the future while living in a constantly changing present?
4. Did the author accomplish her goals for you as a reader? How have you become more grounded by reading this book? What, if anything, surprised you in these pages? Was anything worrisome? Did anything delight you or give you hope? Explain.