

## Further Reading

**The Secret Life of Bees**  
**Sue Monk Kidd (2013)**  
**KIDD**

When Lily Owens' fierce-hearted black "stand-in mother," Rosaleen, insults three of the town's most vicious racists, Lily decides they should both escape to Tiburon, South Carolina--a town that holds the secret to her mother's past. There they are taken in by an eccentric trio of black beekeeping sisters who introduce Lily to a mesmerizing world of bees, honey, and the Black Madonna.

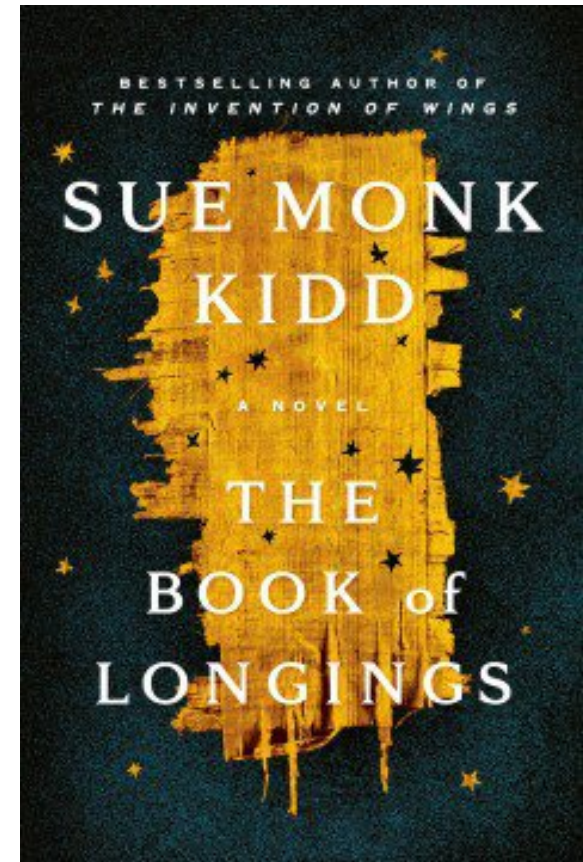
**A.D. 30**  
**Ted Dekker (2014)**  
**INSPIR DEKKER**

Fleeing across the harsh desert to seek an alliance with King Herod, the daughter of a powerful first-century Arabian sheikh unexpectedly encounters an enigmatic teacher who invites her to become his follower.

**The Testament of Mary**  
**Colm Tóibín (2011)**  
**TOIBIN**

Relates the later years of the mother of Jesus and finds her living a solitary existence in Ephesus years after her son's crucifixion and struggling with guilt and anger.

## Book Discussion Guide



## About the Book

An extraordinary story set in the first century about a rebellious woman who finds her voice and her destiny, from the celebrated author of *The Secret Life of Bees* and *The Invention of Wings*.

## Discussion Questions

1. How does the novel's theme of finding and expressing one's authentic voice unfold in the story? What forces work to silence contemporary women and what emboldens them?
2. Though fictional, the novel is also a deeply researched account of life two thousand years ago. What rules and customs surprised you? Which parts of the story feel especially relevant to modern-day life? Did you identify with Ana in any way?
3. Are there inhibiting cultural expectations placed on women today, and if so, how much do they differ depending on other factors such as race, class, and birthplace? How are these expectations represented in marriage ceremonies, then and now?
4. Discuss the relationship between Ana and Jesus. Were there moments they shared in the story that particularly resonated with you? What compromises did Ana make within the marriage? What does it mean to "belong" to someone? What does it mean to belong to oneself?
5. Do you think mainstream depictions of Jesus emphasize his divinity at the expense of allowing for his authentic humanity? Did the novel alter your perception of his character and his life on earth or enhance your existing idea of him in some way?
6. Sue Monk Kidd has explored feminist theology for years, along with what she calls "the missing feminine within religion," which eventually finds expression through the character of Ana. What do you think about the relationship between feminism and religious belief? In what ways can feminism become a spiritual quest?
7. What are some of the different ways the characters cope with loss and injustice? Consider the behavioral differences and the coping mechanisms employed by men and women in the novel. How does grief manifest differently in each character?
8. How much do you think the idea that a woman's purpose is fulfilled by having children persists today? Are women's creative ambitions outside of the family still viewed as less fundamentally fulfilling somehow? Do you know anyone whose passions and pursuits have been affected by motherhood? How so? Positively or negatively?
9. At the end of the novel, Ana ponders why Jesus's followers have removed her from the story of his life: "Was it because I was absent when he traveled about Galilee during his ministry? Was it because women were so often invisible? Did they believe making him celibate rendered him more spiritual?" (page 407). Why do you think Ana would have been silenced and erased?
10. Over the course of Ana's journey, the book returns to the idea of the largeness within people. Explain what she means by this. How do you conceive of your own largeness? What inspires it? What inhibits it? Do you agree with Yaltha that "it isn't the largeness in you that matters most, it's your passion to bring it forth" (page 353)?

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