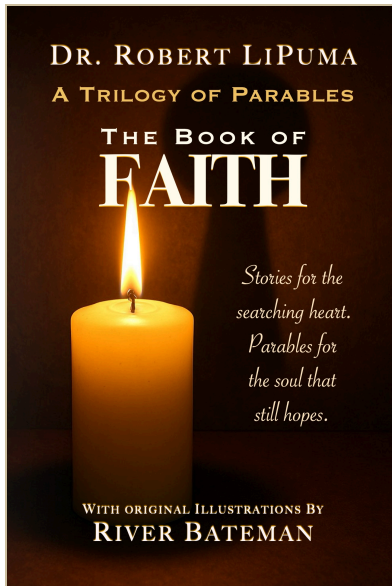


The Book of Faith

A Trilogy of Parables · Book One

BY ROBERT LIPUMA



Paperback · Hardcover · Ebook · Audiobook

IN ONE SENTENCE

A boy waits for rain, a girl can't face the mirror, a young builder is afraid to finish: twelve ordinary people meet a stranger who never gives his name, and the parable he tells each one is enough for the next step.

AT A GLANCE

THE BOOK	Twelve linked stories, each with a parable inside; the last has two. Illustrated by River Bateman.
LENGTH	187 pages in paperback · about 3¼ hours as an audiobook
PACE	One meeting, or four weeks of three chapters each
THEMES	Trust before proof · Broken things that still hold light · Becoming what someone else needs
CONTENT	Gentle and openly Christian. Grief, illness, and a child's suicide attempt, told in the past. Details on page 7.
THE AUTHOR	Robert LiPuma is a retired educator and counselor who writes books of faith, hope, and healing.
COPIES	Paperback, hardcover, and Kindle ebook from Amazon. Book-club leaders: a free leader copy and this guide through Club Glimpse.

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

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Why I wrote it

“

The Book of Faith was one of my earliest projects. I wanted to write about faith, hope, and love through simple stories—stories someone could enjoy first, and perhaps understand more deeply later. I liked the possibility that a reader might remember a story at just the moment they needed it.

My own foundation of faith was shaped at Conception Abbey, where I lived and studied from 1987 to 1989. The students, teachers, and Benedictine monks left a lasting impression on me. Their quiet prayers, steady discipline, and presence helped me understand how much we teach through the way we live.

That stayed with me through more than two decades of service alongside the educators of the Lockport City School District. We spent our days helping others learn, and we learned a great deal ourselves. Sometimes a lesson needed an explanation. Sometimes it needed patience, an example, or someone willing to try again.

When I began this book, I wanted to give those experiences a place in the stories. I wanted faith to feel close to everyday life: caring for someone, asking a difficult question, accepting help, or taking a small step when you aren't sure where it will lead.

That is why the stranger in these pages offers a story. I have always loved how a story lets us discover something for ourselves. We can enjoy it, wonder about it, talk it over—and return to it with a different understanding as our own lives change.

My hope is that you find something here worth carrying with you. And as you read together, I would love for these parables to make room for your own stories, questions, and experiences of faith.

ROBERT LIPUMA

Before you begin

ONE SHAPE, TWELVE TIMES

Each chapter is a story inside a story. Someone, usually in a hard moment, meets a stranger who tells them a parable, set off by three small diamonds and good to read aloud. Then the chapter returns to the person, who takes one small step.

WHAT HE LEAVES BEHIND

In several chapters he gives the person something small: a packet of seeds, a spool of blue thread, a recipe card, a box of matches, a bundle of incense. Watch what each one does with it.

WATCH FOR

Blue painter’s tape. Seeds and gardens. Empty things that turn out to be full: a bucket, a frame, an old incense burner. And blank pages.

THE STRANGER

He tells most chapters himself, as “I.” He never gives his name, and he turns up in humble work: a school janitor, a night-shift nurse’s aide, the owner of a frame shop, a man with a stand outside a summer camp.

FAITH, PLAINLY

God, Jesus and Scripture are named openly, and Chapter 8 makes room for doubt. The book doesn’t argue doctrine. No one needs to share the faith to share the conversation.

BOOK ONE OF THREE

The Book of Hope and *The Book of Love* follow these same twelve people, years later.

KEEPING EVERYONE TOGETHER

A reading plan

ONE MEETING

Read the whole book. It reads in an evening or two, and most chapters stand on their own. Choose one or two questions from each part.

FOUR WEEKS

WEEK	READ	PAGES	WE’LL TALK ABOUT
1	Introduction – Chapter 3	2–47	A boy waiting for rain, a broken mirror, a blue thread
2	Chapters 4–6	48–87	An unfinished bridge, an empty frame, a cup with no handle
3	Chapters 7–9	88–131	A fork in the road, a question about God, bread baked before dawn
4	Chapters 10–12	132–178	A match not struck, the names of the forgotten, a garden tended

Page numbers match the current paperback and hardcover (187 pages). Reading the ebook, or listening to the audiobook? Follow the chapters. In the four-week plan, talk only up to that week’s chapters. For a twelve-week study, take one chapter a week.

Sixteen questions

Four parts that follow the book

SEND AHEAD

three to share before you meet

Each part ends with one question closer to home

1

The Bucket, the Mirror, the Thread

INTRODUCTION – CHAPTER 3 · PAGES 2–47

- 1 The Introduction calls faith “that place where trust comes before proof.” Forty-seven days without rain, and every morning the boy sets out his bucket anyway, while the other children call him “Rainboy.” Is that faith, or stubbornness? Is there a difference? **SEND AHEAD**
- 2 The tall girl who dropped a dead leaf in his bucket is the one who joins him. In the parable, the girl who doubted takes up the bucket herself: “Not to prove anything—just in case.” The boy’s mother planted flowers in dry years for the same reason. Is “just in case” a kind of faith?
- 3 In the parable of the mirror, a girl keeps a shard “Not to see herself. Just to see light.” Years later she tapes it back into the empty frame: “Not to fix it. Just so it would be seen.” What is the difference between fixing something and letting it be seen? Which does the girl on the recovery floor need first?

4

CLOSER TO HOME

The woman in the café asks, “Do you really think some connections survive even when we stop taking care of them?” The stranger answers with a spool of blue thread and a question: “Want to find out?” Is there a connection in your life you stopped tending that might still hold?

2

The Bridge, the Frame, the Cup

CHAPTERS 4–6 · PAGES 48–87

- 5 Joshua “was afraid of finishing things,” and the fear peaks when he is two days from done. The parable puts it this way: “faith is not believing your work will be perfect. Faith is believing your work will be enough.” Why might finishing frighten someone more than starting? Is “enough” easier than “perfect,” or harder?
- 6 In the parable, some call the empty frame “pretentious” and others “lazy,” while many stand before it for long minutes. Eliza says simply, “I see God.” Can an empty space hold something? Why might two people look at the same frame and see opposite things?
- 7 Thomas’s daughter makes him a cup with no handle, because “some things teach us strength in the holding.” At first he thought she was “giving me a broken cup.” Was her gift a kindness or a hard lesson? Can it be both?

8

CLOSER TO HOME

Thomas says the people in the hospital are “all learning to hold things differently than they used to.” What are you learning to hold with both hands? Has it taken something from you, or given you something?

- 9 David has carried a rejection letter for twenty-three years. In the parable, the woman who chose the city and the teacher who stayed in the mountains each half-envy the other's road. The stranger tells David that "God doesn't waste anything." Was David's road a wrong turn, or a preparation? Whatever words you would use, does that idea hold up?
- 10 Ethan's parable is about a village that carved every answer in stone and forgot how to wonder. It closes: "doubt isn't the opposite of faith, but often its most honest expression." Ethan decides the real opposite might be "apathy." Do you agree? What would you say is the opposite of faith? [SEND AHEAD](#)
- 11 Alina has been caring for her mother around the clock. After the baker's story she says, "I've been thinking of this as a burden," and then, "Now I think maybe it's a privilege." Is that change believable in one night? Can caregiving be a burden and a privilege at once?

12 CLOSER TO HOME

The baker says, "Love looks like rising when you'd rather rest." Who rose early for you when you couldn't do it yourself? For whom are you rising now?

- 13 Ryan is afraid of his own anger. The stranger tells him, "That anger you carry? It's not your father's. It's yours. Which means you get to choose what you do with it." Is that a relief, or a heavier load? The stranger says he knows Ryan's look: "I wore it myself for a lot of years." Who do you think the boy in the parable grew up to be?
- 14 Daniel is "the one everyone forgot to remember," yet he knows the camp's hidden griefs. The boy in his parable says, "Because names have power. Because when we forget people, we forget parts of ourselves." Daniel remembers the living too: a quiet camper with a stutter, a cleaner no one said goodbye to. What do we lose when we forget people?
- 15 Margaret has carried the stranger's stories since she was seven. When she asks his name, he answers, "Names are for people who remain the same." Look back at the eleven people before her. Is the stranger one man, or something anyone might become?

16 CLOSER TO HOME

In the parable Margaret tells, the gardener says, "I was never planting for the harvest." She has taught for thirty-seven years. What have you planted that you may never see grow? Who planted something in you?

[SEND AHEAD](#)

For the leader

Three passages to read aloud

TO OPEN

Introduction · page 4

From “You may notice someone who appears throughout these pages” to “The stories will show you the rest.”

THE HEART OF IT

Chapter 8 · pages 111–113

From “When did we decide that wondering was the enemy?” to “one of the most sacred capacities human beings possess.”

TO CLOSE

Chapter 12 · pages 169–172

From “There once was a gardener” to “the multiplication of it, forever.”

The twelve stories

1 · The bucket	A boy sets out his bucket in a drought. The stranger is the school janitor.	7 · The road	David, forty-five, a lawyer whose wife has left, back at the crossroads.
2 · The mirror	A former dancer, seventeen, on a recovery floor. He is the night aide.	8 · The question	Ethan, sixteen, with questions about God that make adults uneasy.
3 · The thread	A woman stranded in her grandmother’s town. He works nights at the café.	9 · The bread	Alina, twenty-two, caring for her dying mother. He makes the night rounds.
4 · The bridge	Joshua, seventeen, two days from finishing a bridge and afraid to.	10 · The match	Ryan, three days after he almost hit a classmate, with one match in his hand.
5 · The frame	Eliza Chen, nineteen, cleans a gallery. He owns the frame shop next door.	11 · The names	Daniel, fifteen, works maintenance at a camp. He keeps a stand by the gates.
6 · The cup	Thomas, sixty-two, has Parkinson’s and pours free coffee at Mercy General.	12 · The garden	Margaret, a teacher for thirty-seven years, searching for someone.

A 75-minute meeting

TIME	PART	WHAT HAPPENS
0:00	Welcome	A candle on the table, like the one on the cover. Say which chapters you're discussing.
0:05	Warm-up	Once around, no debate: "Name someone who showed up for you at just the right time."
0:15	The story	Questions from the parts you read. Try to hear every voice once.
0:35	Read aloud	One of the three passages, then the questions it opens.
1:00	Closer to home	The "closer to home" questions. Invited, never required.
1:10	Close	Each person names one line or moment to carry away. End with the question to take home.

LEADER TIPS

- Send the three "send ahead" questions a few days early. People who arrive with one thought speak sooner.
- "Pass" is always an answer.
- The book speaks of God plainly. Welcome every answer, doubt included. Chapter 8 does.
- Some chapters carry grief, and Chapter 12 a suicide attempt. Read the note on care before you meet.
- For 60 minutes, shorten the story questions. For 90, give "closer to home" more time.

AN ACTIVITY • OPTIONAL • ABOUT 15 MINUTES

The empty frame

Stand any empty picture frame on the table with a card that reads "Reserved for what you need to see." Hand out index cards and pencils. After a quiet minute with the frame, each person draws or writes what they see, as the gallery visitors do in Chapter 5. Fold the cards into a basket "For those who wish to respond," and read a few aloud, unsigned, if the group is willing.

A NOTE ON CARE

What's in the book

The Book of Faith is gentle, but it goes to hard places:

- Grief, mostly told in passing: a boy's mother (Chapter 1), an estranged grandmother (Chapter 3), a wife (Chapter 6), and a daughter and a husband remembered at a summer camp (Chapter 11).
- A seventeen-year-old on a recovery floor; her illness is never named. In the parable, an angry home (Chapter 2).
- Parkinson's (Chapter 6), a marriage ending (Chapter 7), and a mother dying at home in hospice care (Chapter 9).
- A teenager afraid of becoming like his father, and a mother who drinks. In the parable, a father who drinks and leaves bruises, and a boy who nearly sets fire to a nativity scene (Chapter 10).
- A woman remembers being in the hospital at seven after trying to end her life. It is told in the past; the book mentions bandages and a scar on her wrist, nothing more. In the parable, a child whose parents died in an accident (Chapter 12).

Nothing is graphic, and there is no strong language. In the room, sharing is always invited and never required. If someone in your group is struggling, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline answers calls and texts at 988 in the US.

A QUESTION TO TAKE HOME

The stranger “always arrives exactly when he’s needed,” and he often leaves something small behind: seeds, a spool of thread, a recipe card, a box of matches. Who needs you this week? What small thing could you leave with them?

CONTINUE THE TRILOGY

The Book of Hope (Book Two) returns to these twelve people, years later. *The Book of Love* (Book Three) completes the trilogy.

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