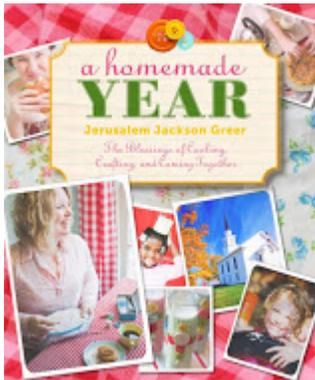


## Reflection and Discussion Guide

---



### **A Homemade Year: The Blessings of Cooking, Crafting, and Coming Together**

by Jerusalem Jackson Greer

---

#### **About the Book**

*This gorgeously designed book is a guide to celebrating the rhythm of life's calendar of events, as well as celebrating the Christian liturgical year, as they focuses on God's love in our lives. Greer weaves her own faith story into her original recipes, crafts, and entertaining ideas, creating a vibrant, personal narrative that is a modern take on timeless traditions.*

---

*Note: This Reflection Guide is meant to be a companion piece to the book, **A Homemade Year: the Blessings of Cooking, Crafting, and Coming Together** by author Jerusalem Jackson Greer. This guide was written with book clubs and families in mind, but it can be easily adapted for use in a homeschooling context, in Sunday school programs, and small discipleship groups.*

#### **Begin by reading the Preface and reflect:**

Jerusalem's spiritual path took her through many different expressions of faith. What twists and turns have you made along your spiritual path to arrive where you are now?

Is your current faith tradition different than the one you grew up with?

How does your heritage compliment your current experience?

Jerusalem wants **A Homemade Year** to be a book that inspires, not a book that creates an unrealistic standard and more busy work. What sort of inspiration are you hoping to find in this book?

**Next, if possible, read the book (and this guide) in order of the seasons, not in order of the chapters. For instance, if the month you begin reading is April, then begin with the Spring Section.**

## Winter

### **Chapter 1: Advent** (begins four Sundays before December 25)

#### Scripture Reading

Isaiah 11:1–10

#### Questions for Reflection

Jerusalem shares that for her the season of Advent can be filled with pressure to keep up with the Jones and to put on a happy face on the outside despite how weary she feels on the inside. Do you face a similar struggle? Do you feel pressure during Advent to “keep up with the Jones?”

Why do you think it can be especially hard during the holidays to be honest about what is broken in our lives?

What is one thing you can do differently this Advent to help suspend expectations and better enter into the mystery of the season?

#### Action

Do you know someone who is struggling to create moments of peace and beauty during Advent? How can you help?

Perhaps you could:

- Babysit for a single mother

- Help put up Christmas decorations in a senior citizen’s home

- Wrap gifts for a family that is juggling multiple jobs or struggling with an illness

- Make an Advent Wreath or Advent Garland to take to a new family in your neighborhood or church to welcome them into your community

### **Chapter 2: St. Lucy Day** (December 13)

#### Scripture Reading

Job 33:29–30

#### Questions for Reflection

The theme of friendship as a saving grace is woven throughout **A Homemade Year**. In this chapter Jerusalem remembers a time when her friends sacrificed for others. Is there a friendship in your life that has taught you about giving?

What non-material gift are you the most stingy with?

How can you give this part of yourself more freely?

### Action

Because St. Lucia served others, think of a way you can honor her example and the call that Christ has given us to take care of the widows and orphans and those less fortunate than we are.

Perhaps you could:

Bake a batch or two of St. Lucy buns and take them to a nursing home, or to older neighbors that live alone.

Host a St. Lucia party and invite families with foster children over. Serve Lucy buns and warm milk, and give parting gifts of small candles to each visitor, reminding them that we can all be the light of Christ's love no matter how old or how young we are.

## **Chapter 3: Christmas Day** (December 25)

### Scripture Reading

John 1:1–14

### Questions for Reflection

For Mary and Joseph, the first Christmas was their first day with Jesus. Their lives were forever changed by adding him to their family, and by who he was, and how he would change the world for all people. On this Christmas Day, we each have the opportunity to start fresh, and to remember how our lives have been changed by living life with Christ.

If someone were to stop you right where you are today, in your pajamas by your Christmas tree, at the gas station filling the car with gas to go to grandma's house, or washing the dishes after the family meal, and asked you, "how is your life different because of Christ?" What would your answer be?

### Action

Often we are called "to go" when to stay would be so much more comfortable. Take a minute to reflect—is there an area of your life where you strongly feel that you should "go" but you are afraid of the unknown—of taking the first step? If the answer is yes, answer the following questions, then pray for guidance, and courage, for all three answers.

- 1) Where am I being nudged to "go"?
- 2) What is the worst thing that could happen if I do?
- 3) What is the best thing that could happen if I do?

Is there a way that your family, church group, or book club, could practice "going" together? Perhaps volunteering regularly at a local charity that is outside your comfort zone?

## **Chapter 4: St. Stephens Day** (December 26)

### Scripture Reading

Acts 6–7

### Questions for Reflection

In this chapter Jerusalem shares her desire to give God options as a way to exert control over her life. She uses the analogy of two types of tests: long essay and multiple choice. Have you ever handed God a multiple-choice test when you should have written an essay ?

What is one area of your life that you are currently trying to control or manipulate into being what you want instead of waiting patiently to see what God has for you?

### Action

Research the history of the song "Good King Wenceslas." Have children create a small book telling the story. Use the lyrics of the song as the text, and have children illustrate them.

Have each family member decorate a small box to collect money in during the coming year. Each month, or at the end of each year, give the funds to a charity that is providing meals for the hungry, or shelter for the homeless.

## **Chapter 5: Epiphany** (January 6)

### Scripture Reading

Isaiah 60:1–6

### Questions for Reflection

While Jerusalem loves her boys, she never planned on being solely a “boy mom.” Much like Mary, Jerusalem is a mother who had to radically alter her plan for her life in order to be a better parent. Jerusalem believes that changing her expectations helped her change her attitude.

What life-altering circumstances or “change of plans” have you experienced?

How could you think differently about these challenges?

Where could you find adventure, courage, and growth, if you only changed your expectations and outlook?

### Action

Is there something that you want to do but have been too afraid to try? Now is your chance! Challenge each other.

## **Chapter 6: Candelmas** (February 2)

### Scripture Reading:

Luke 2:22–39

### Questions for Reflection

Have you ever found yourself in the midst of a bleak and barren season—either0 literally or figuratively—when the smallest bit of light broke through the darkness?

Talk about that experience.

What was the bit of light that broke through?

How did it help?

### Action

Give the gift of light! Collect flashlights, warm socks, gloves, bottled water and clean sleeping bags to take to those groups in your community who work with homeless people. Create disaster kits complete with candles, matches, flashlights, and glow sticks, and take them to elderly people who live alone.

## Spring

### **Chapter 7: Shrove Tuesday** (Tuesday before Ash Wednesday)

#### Scripture Reading

Exodus 16

#### Questions for Reflection

Jerusalem shares how she was often afraid to admit her insecurities, her disappointments, or her hopes to others, because she believed they were signs of weak faith. Do you feel this same hesitation?

If so, why do you think that is?

If you have someone in your life who you feel safe to share both the broken and the beautiful places of your life, take a moment to share what makes that relationship safe.

What are the ways that that person conveyed to you that it was safe to open your inner life to them.?

#### Action

In Christ, we are called to love our neighbor as ourselves, no matter who our neighbor is. One way we can love our neighbors is to be a safe place for those who may have been socially rejected to talk openly.

Think of one person you are wary of expressing love to because of differences in beliefs, appearances, or lifestyle.

Now make a list of three ways you can reach out to this person through kind, gentle, and humble actions.

Finally, challenge yourself (and each other) to implement each of those three things over the next three weeks, or three months, or perhaps even over three years. Remember, safe relationships take time.

**Chapter 8: Ash Wednesday** (The first Wednesday of Lent, 40 days—not counting Sundays—before Easter)

Scripture Reading  
Isaiah 58

Questions for Reflection

One of the purposes of Ash Wednesday is to remember that from dust we came and to dust we shall return. In other words, during Lent we come face to face with who we are. We acknowledge, that like corn being shucked, there are times when it feels like God is ripping away the parts of us that are keeping us from a life lived in him.

When have you felt this sort of ripping in your life?

What was it that needed to be stripped away in order for you to be whole?

Action

Work on learning the "Prayer of St. Francis" together:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; Where there is hatred, let me sow charity; Where there is injury, pardon; Where there is error, the truth; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; and Where there is sadness, joy. O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; To be understood as to understand; To be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; It is in pardoning that we are pardoned; And it is in dying to ourselves that we are born to eternal life. Amen.*

**Chapter 9: Lent** (The forty days before Easter, not counting Sundays.)

Scripture Readings  
Matthew 4:1—17

Questions for Reflection

In this chapter Jerusalem shares a story of when she felt out of her comfort zone, and how sometimes this is the place that becomes our desert. Can you describe a “desert” moment in your life?

How did your time in the desert change you?

Did you fight against or surrender to what God was teaching you in that season?

Action Together with your family or friends make a poster that says “Be kinder than necessary, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.” Discuss as a family how the poster relates to the idea that everyone is either entering a desert, in a desert, or leaving a

desert. How does this idea change how you treat people—even rude people? Hang the poster somewhere prominent where you will all see it. Let it remind you to show mercy.

## **Chapter 10: St. Joseph Day** (March 19)

### Scripture Reading

Matthew 1:1–24

Matthew 2:13–21

### Questions for Reflection

A common theme that runs throughout **A Homemade Year** is grace. In this chapter Jerusalem shares how she has to show grace and patience to herself when she makes mistakes and then has to be willing to begin again. Do you find starting over hard as well?

Is “try, try again” a value in your home?

Are you free to admit mistakes and be encouraged to redeem those mistakes?

What do you beat yourself up for most?

How can you shower grace upon yourself?

### Action

Together learn this prayer. Perhaps make bookmarks or index cards with this prayer written out on them and tape them to bathroom mirrors or inside school binders.

"Serenity Prayer" by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971)

God grant me the serenity

to accept the things I cannot change;

courage to change the things I can;

and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;

enjoying one moment at a time;

accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;

taking, as He did, this sinful world

as it is, not as I would have it;

trusting that He will make all things right

if I surrender to His Will;

that I may be reasonably happy in this life

and supremely happy with Him

forever in the next.

Amen.

## **Chapter 11: Palm Sunday** (Sunday before Easter)

### Scripture Reading

John 12

### Questions for Reflection

Here we read of a time when Jerusalem felt overwhelmed by her life. Instead of sharing her vulnerability with friends and her church family, she fled. How do you handle similar situations? Are you more likely to share or to flee when you are feeling overwhelmed?

Jerusalem found beauty in the chairs that someone else had thrown away. Tell about a time you found beauty in something that everyone else thought was ordinary.

### Action

What do you think Jesus meant when he said: "The next time you put on a dinner, don't just invite your friends and family and rich neighbors—the kind of people who will return the favor. Invite some people who never get invited out;—the misfits from the "wrong side of the tracks." You'll be—and experience—a blessing. They won't be able to return the favor, but the favor will be returned—oh, how it will be returned!—at the resurrection of God's people" (Luke 14:12–14).

What do you think you would find at a dinner like that?

How can you host that dinner? At your school? At your office? In your neighborhood?

## **Chapter 12: Maundy Thursday** (The Thursday before Easter)

### Scripture Reading

Exodus 13, Luke 22

### Questions for Reflection

Like many people, Jerusalem was impacted by a negative church experience that left her feeling lost. Have you ever had a disappointing or frustrating church experience?

How did you find solace in that season? What inside your heart still needs healing from that experience?

What group or community do you find comfort in, especially during major life events?

What meals do you remember for who you were with, or what was happening in your life, rather than for the food you ate?

### Action

Who can you love by providing or sharing a meal with over the next few weeks?

The writer Shauna Niequist says *I think preparing food and feeding people brings nourishment not only to our bodies but to our spirits. Feeding people is a way of loving them, in the same way that feeding ourselves is a way of honoring our own createdness and fragility.* See if you can restate this in your own words. Give examples of ways you have loved others or been loved through the sharing of a meal. Make a plan to pass this gift on.

## **Chapter 13: Holy Saturday** (Saturday before Easter)

### Reading

Matthew 27: 27–56

### Questions for Reflection

Jerusalem sees her grandparents' home as a refuge—as the place she goes when she has hard questions to wrestle with. Do you have a refuge?

Where do you go, or to whom do you go, when you are facing hard decisions?

What is it about that place or person that brings you comfort?

### Action

Write thank you notes to those people who have provided refuge for you. Using markers or crayons draw a picture of your perfect peaceful place. Notice the things you add to the picture—the colors, the textures, the objects, the people or other parts of creation. Say a prayer of thanksgiving for this place, or a prayer of petition that God would lead you to this place when you need rest.

## **Chapter 14: Easter**

### Scripture Reading

John 20

### Questions for Reflection

Jerusalem shares a sweet story of cutting up her mother's favorite fabric, and learning about beauty coming from ashes. Easter is about life overcoming death. What are the Easter moments of your life?

When have you seen new life springing forth from a place of death—the death of a relationship, an idea, a plan, a business et al?

How does that experience inform the way you celebrate Easter now?

### Action

Sometimes we miss the beauty in a person because we are too busy looking at the outside instead of getting to know the person on the inside. Christ was the greatest example of how to look past a person's outward appearance and focus on the person's heart. Is there someone who comes to mind that you should try to know better despite outward differences?

## **Summer**

## **Chapter 15: Pentecost** (The fiftieth day after Easter)

### Scripture Reading:

Acts 2:1–21

### Questions for Reflection

All too often a simple misunderstanding or miscommunication can lead to a huge gulf between people. Can you recall a time when you misunderstood or misconstrued what someone else was saying to you?

How did that impact your relationship?

How did you correct the misunderstanding?

Have you ever felt as if the Holy Spirit has opened your ears to hear what someone was really trying to tell you beyond their words?

### Action

Ask each family member the following: Who is one person you can reach out to this week whom others have rejected? How can you open your hearts and your ears this week? When can you be listening instead of speaking?

Pray this prayer together as you consider these questions: *Lord, please open our eyes, our ears, and our hearts to those whose words and lives are different from ours. Give us words to speak that they will understand, so that we can tell them of your amazing gifts of love and mercy. Help us to see your light in the faces of those who make us uncomfortable, and give us courage to make friends with those who have been rejected.. Help us to remember that none of us can earn, or lose your love, and give us the opportunities to share that good news with those who are hurting most.*

## **Chapter 16: Corpus Christi** (The Thursday following Trinity Sunday)

### Scripture Reading

Mark 14:17–26

### Questions for Reflection

To live out our Eucharistic experience, we must approach our daily lives with as much humility and thanksgiving as we bring to the communion table. What is one element of your day-to-day life for which you are having a hard time having a thankful heart?

How can you change your attitude about this?

### Action

Bake bread to be delivered to all those that serve you—mail persons, gas station attendants, janitors at work and school, nurses, garbage collectors. Just as our pastors and priests serve us the Eucharist, so these other people serve us—often in thankless jobs—keeping so many of the mundane details of our lives rolling along seamlessly.

## **Chapter 17: St. James Day** (July 25)

### Scripture Reading

Mark 1: 12–20

Luke 9:51–56

### Questions for Reflection

**A Homemade Year** is filled with stories of redemption. In this chapter Jerusalem shares her desire to live authentically, and not to create the image of a perfect life or a more “together” life than other people. This habit of comparing our insides to other people's outsides can be destructive in so many ways. Is this a comparison that you also struggle with?

Do you want people to think you are fine when you aren't that your life is going smoothly when it is actually falling apart?

How can you practice transparency and authenticity? What would it take for you to be honest?

### Action

Read *The Velveteen Rabbit* and discuss the metaphor of being made real through being loved. Watch the movie *Spanglish* (appropriate ages only) and discuss the differences between the characters Flora and Debra. Compare and contrast how striving for perfection versus seeking authenticity can affect family relationships.

## **Chapter 18: Ordinary Time**

### Scripture Reading

Romans 12

### Questions for Reflection

Like Jerusalem at her laundry line, how can you take your God-given life and embrace the most simple daily acts, offering them up as prayers of thanksgiving and praise?

What daily chore can you use as a time for conversing with your Maker? Doing the dishes? The laundry? Vacuuming? Walking the dog?

Is this something you already do? Share your experience.

### Action

Practice sitting in your living or family room and not turning the TV on or looking at your phone or computer. Read, doodle, stitch, work on a puzzle. Watch to see who comes to talk with you and what conversations start because of your simple presence.

Want to be brave? Practice this act of presence in a public place. The park, the library, a bench in the mall. Wait and see who sits down beside you. Sometimes all someone needs is another one of God's creation to receive them and to listen.

## Fall

### **Chapter 19: Holy Cross Sunday** (September 14)

Scripture Reading:  
Psalm 118

#### Questions for Reflection

Jerusalem's family life was changed by a powerful tornado. There are many other catastrophic events that can occur. Have you ever lived through something that was, or felt as if it were, earth shattering?

Who were the cross bearers for you in that experience? Who brought you comfort—physical and emotional?

What does it mean to bear the mark of the cross?

#### Action

Who is experiencing catastrophic events in your town? What is one hands-on thing you can offer to bring comfort to these people?

How can your family better support those who are living in or ministering to people in disaster-hit areas around the world?

### **Chapter 20: Michaelmas** (September 29)

Scripture Reading:  
Revelation 12

#### Questions for Reflection

Extreme loneliness is a dragon that many people battle. For Jerusalem it was a group of unlikely friends that slayed this monster in her life. What earthly dragons do you battle?

Have your friends ever helped to slay any of those dragons?

Who helps overcome the loneliness in your life?

### Action

Often exclusion and discrimination can lead to extreme loneliness. How can you help to fight the dragons of discrimination and hate in your community? Where are the people in your school or neighborhood or church who are excluded? How can you include them?

## **Chapter 21: All Souls & Saints Day (October 31 and Nov 1)**

### Scripture Reference

Proverbs 1:1–9

### Questions for Reflection

The Mexican belief of three deaths is a fascinating one. Jerusalem finds the third death to be the saddest. What about you? Which of the three deaths causes you the most grief?

What is your spiritual heritage?

Whose spiritual heritage do you think you might be a part of? How does that change how you feel about sharing your story?

### Action

Just as it is important to learn and study about those who have gone before us in our faith—the leaders, the martyrs, the saints, it is also important to remember and learn about our family's faith history. We are all part of the "story of God,"—we each are part of the crazy quilt and, while our roles may not be as famous as Moses or Mother Teresa, they are still part of the story, and it is important that they are told. Consider creating a paper chain out of construction paper and tape, with the name of every faith ancestor in your life, and in the lives of your family members.

## **Chapter 22: Christ the King Sunday (Last Sunday before Advent begins)**

### Scripture

Philippians 2:6–11

### Questions for Reflection

In this chapter Jerusalem shares her temptation to push Christ away—to do things her own way—to claim that she is unlovable and to put up walls. Have you ever felt this way?

Do you find surrendering to Christ hard? Why?

Does the idea of surrender create fear or defensive reactions in you?

If so, what are those fears rooted in?

## Action

They say that imitation is the greatest form of flattery. Christ's version of a king was not what the world expected of a king. *When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.*

What privileges do you enjoy because of your sex, race, age, income, birth order, nationality etc? What privileges could you put aside for a week? How would your life look if you didn't have those privileges anymore?

---

Jerusalem Jackson Greer is the author of **A Homemade Year: The Blessings of Cooking, Crafting, and Coming Together**. She is a blogger, a minister to families, and a farmstead newbie. Jerusalem lives with her husband and two boys on eight acres of land in central Arkansas. Together they are attempting to live a slower version of modern life. She writes about all this and more at [jerusalemgreer.com](http://jerusalemgreer.com).

*I began reading **A Homemade Year** one afternoon when I had no fewer than a thousand things going on in my house. Almost immediately, I was drawn into Jerusalem Greer's beautiful writing and became fascinated with her journey through an entire year of liturgical celebrations—some of which (Advent, Epiphany) I celebrate in my own home, but some of which I never knew about before. Two hours later, I was still reading, happily resigned to letting my plans for the day slide. Jerusalem so clearly conveys the significance and beauty of liturgical tradition, and her celebration-specific recipes and crafts are sweet and meaningful, while at the same time completely "do-able" for everyone. This book is an absolute treasure. I want to share it with everyone I know" —Ree Drummond, #1 New York Times bestselling author of **The Pioneer Woman Cooks**.*

*Like many moms, I'm longing to create a sense of rhythm and tradition in our lives and our home, and this sweet book gives many imaginative, practical places to start. —Shauna Niequist, author of **Bread and Wine**.*

- Genre: Christian Living, Family, Non-Fiction
  - Paperback: 224 pages
- Publisher: Paraclete Press (April 1, 2013)
  - Language: English
  - ISBN-10: 1612610676
  - ISBN-13: 978-1612610672