



## *This Messy Magnificent Life: A Field Guide*

by Geneen Roth

# Reader's Group Guide

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This reading group guide for *This Messy Magnificent Life* includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

### Introduction

With humor, compassion, and insight, *This Messy Magnificent Life* explores the personal beliefs, hidden traumas, and social pressures that shape not just women's feelings about their bodies, but also their confidence, choices, and relationships. This provocative, enchanting, and sometimes laugh-out-loud look at the imperfect path women take to step into their own power, presence, and ownership is based on author Geneen Roth's personal journey and her decades of work with thousands of women around the world.

### Topics & Questions for Discussion

1. In the Foreword, Anne Lamott says of Geneen Roth, "Never before had someone expressed so brilliantly, and with such wit, that curiosity and self-love were the way home" (x). What does Lamott mean by home here? Does it have more than one meaning?
2. In relinquishing the "Project of Me", Roth says she had "tried versions of not fixing myself before, but always with the secret hope that not fixing myself would fix me" (3). Where are the hidden traps in hoping to fix yourself by not fixing yourself? Why is it difficult to let go of the idea of fixing ourselves?
3. Throughout *This Messy Magnificent Life*, Roth stresses the importance of attention, where we direct our attention and how it affects our awareness of ourselves. Discuss the divisions between "you" and what you pay attention to.
4. Roth repeats "There is no away" (38) to herself as she recovers from a fractured vertebrae to remind herself that she and her body are indivisible. Do you find yourselves using an "away" in your own lives? Discuss how this might be disserving you.

5. Why do we often focus on a future that we put ourselves “on hold for” (49)? What are the benefits and disadvantages of that?
6. What does it mean to “muster equal parts kindness and fierceness” (84) and why is it important to do so?
7. Is it possible to know who we “are at the deepest level” (125)? Why or why not?
8. On page 106, Roth says, “Joy takes realizing what separates us from it and challenging our familiar stories” (106). What are some of the familiar stories you tell yourselves? How do they separate you from joy?
9. Roth describes “songs” (137) that play in her mind when circumstances trigger negative feelings, painful memories, or past selves that she wishes to leave behind. Why can’t these songs be deleted? What songs play in your mind? What are some ways to cope with our own personal songs?
10. If you stopped complaining for a time, as Roth did (148), would you notice a difference? Would those around you notice a difference? What might take up the space left by not complaining?
11. How do we miss “showing up for this messy, magnificent life” (196)? How do we start showing up? What does that look like?
12. Discuss as a group which touchstones (197) have the most resonance for you personally and why. Which touchstones do you think you might carry with you?

## Enhance Your Book Club

1. Try the red string exercise from pages 52 to 61. Discuss as a group where your boundaries are, both mentally and physically, and where you would like them to be.
2. On page 126, Roth quotes author Annie Dillard: “The way you spend your days is the way you spend your life.” Read Dillard’s *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and discuss the way she spends her days as well as the power of observation. Try paying close attention to your own experiences for a day and then write about them.
3. Make a “messy” and “magnificent” collage that reflects your life and share it with your group. What does messy and magnificent look like for different people? What might these differences convey?

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