



## *UNITED STATES OF GRACE: A MEMOIR OF HOMELESSNESS, ADDICTION, INCARCERATION, AND HOPE*

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# REFLECTION GUIDE

## PREFACE

1. Before opening this book, how would you have defined America?
2. Is it foolish to believe in the notion of a nation for all, or do you believe that nation already exists?
3. Why is grace such a bold claim in times like these?

## CHAPTER 1

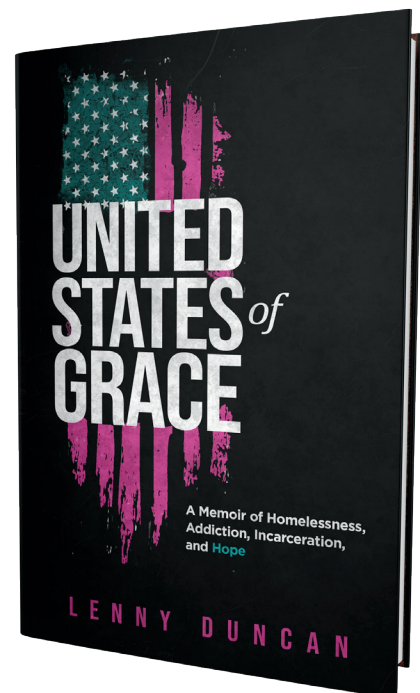
1. What was surprising to you about the setting and cast of characters in this opening story? What was familiar?
2. Who embodies grace in this opening story?
3. Why do you think Lenny suggests that it is the “broken, shadow places, those cracks in between society where most of my generation fell” where he experienced God the most?
4. How can you honor Lenny’s request to respect his experiences as real, whether they match your own experiences or not?

## CHAPTER 2

1. How would you describe your roots, or as Lenny puts it, the “generational chain of events that set your own life and story in motion”?
2. Lenny says, “I still believe that sharing our stories can somehow bring us closer to tasting the divine.” What from this chapter helped you taste the divine?
3. Can you think of another story (something you read, or a story someone told you) that offered you a similar feeling of divine connection?
4. Does Lenny’s description of Black joy in this chapter sound familiar or surprising to you?

## CHAPTER 3

1. How does Lenny’s description of Blackness in this chapter sit with you? Do you feel challenged or affirmed?



2. Lenny says, “My Blackness is not normative.” Why do we so often want to define groups as a monolith?
3. Can you remember the moment when you were “informed” of your race?

## CHAPTER 4

1. How does this chapter define freedom?
2. Have you ever looked into the eyes of another person and seen God—as Lenny did with the Black momma at the bus station?
3. Lenny says that music is “the most powerful controlled substance in the world.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. What does this chapter seem to suggest about the divine hand in the events of our lives? Do you believe that God or fate has a plan?

## CHAPTER 5

1. Before reading this book, how would you have defined “the great American adventure”?
2. How does Lenny’s definition in this chapter compare to your own?
3. Where in your own life and journey have you seen glimpses of the sacred spark and fire that Lenny describes in this chapter?

## CHAPTER 6

1. Where in your community can you turn to learn the queer histories that have been hidden or tucked away?
2. Lenny describes homelessness as simultaneously invisible (“all the world is passing you by on its way to the important work of society”) and hyper-visible (“you live in a glass bowl for all the world to judge, measure, and find wanting”). How can you commit to truly seeing the “worlds within worlds” around you without judgment?
3. How has this chapter expanded your notions about sex work?
4. How do we create cannon out of the miracle that is queer faith?

## CHAPTER 7

1. What moments from your own life do you wish you could enshrine and hold on to?
2. This chapter depicts a near-lynching. What does it reveal for you about the continued legacy of lynching in the US?
3. Who is your patron saint?

## CHAPTER 8

1. What are the long-term effects to our society when we continue to outsource our work of building a just society to the prison industrial complex?
2. What does Lenny mean by “poverty porn” in this chapter?

3. What does this story reveal about what it means to “play by the rules” in America?
4. What lessons can be learned from the prisoner?

## CHAPTER 9

1. Who were your mentors growing up?
2. How does this chapter describe the relative benefits and downfalls of the “path of respectability” in a white supremacist society?
3. How does our current model of adulthood hamper free thinking, innovation, and community?

## CHAPTER 10

1. How do you define family?
2. In whose story are you a sign of life and resurrection? In whose story are you the cause of heartbreak?
3. What does it take to show up in our relationships and communities after trust has been broken?

## CHAPTER 11

1. How has imposter syndrome shown up in your life?
2. How do you reconcile the notion that oppressive institutions are chock full of good people trying to make a difference?
3. Does your image of God match the image of God portrayed by the religion of your upbringing?
4. In what ways is the church culpable for the white supremacist and patriarchal roots of our society? In what ways is the church working to dismantle those roots?

## CHAPTER 12

1. What has the COVID-19 pandemic revealed to you about the inequities in our society?
2. Where in your life does God seem absent right now? Where does God seem present?
3. Where in your life do you see “the patterns of mercy etched into the very foundations of the world”?

## EPILOGUE

1. After finishing this book, how do you define America?
2. What about this country is worth living and dying for?
3. Do you agree with Lenny that love will always win?