

reading guide

FOR INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION AND GROUP DISCUSSION

I'M ALWAYS AMAZED AT HOW MUCH MORE A BOOK means to me when I take the time to write down how it applies to me personally or talk it through with friends. That's what I hope this reading guide to *All In* can facilitate for you. I recommend you engage with the questions first on your own in a time of focused reflection and journaling. Then get together with other men on the same journey to share your thoughts and listen to what they have to say.

I promise you'll make important discoveries about yourself, your life story, your feelings, and your current challenges. In fact, consider using this book to start your own ALL IN group. (For more resources in this regard, go to www.allinbook.com.) You'll be making a life-changing investment in yourself and all those who journey with you. It certainly has been that for me.

—Allen

(A note: While all questions lend themselves to conversation, three in each chapter are particularly well suited for sharing and exploring with others. These have been marked with the discussion icon )

chapter 1: the view from the top

1. Not far into his opening chapter, Allen puts his offer on the table: “This is a book for men who are ready to explore the terra incognita [unknown territory] of their hidden self in order to achieve the life they deeply want.” Reading those words made you feel (choose one):
 - a. Excited and lucky—“Let’s go! This is going to be great!”
 - b. Open, but cautious—“Okay, but one step at a time and we’ll see where this goes.”
 - c. Relieved—“Finally. This might be just what I’ve been waiting for.”
 - d. Nervous—“Um, my ‘hidden self’? I’m pretty sure it’s a snake pit in there!”
2. Have you gone through a “my little kingdom is crumbling” moment? If so, what precipitated the crisis for you? What did you most fear losing? 
3. Do you agree with Allen’s observation, “The very same skills, values, and mindset that catapult you up in life can also bring you crashing down”? 
4. Beginning with “We crave freedom yet . . .” on page 19, Allen identifies paradoxes that most men can relate to. Of the four listed, which one describes you best? Why?

5. If you have been in a group of men where you felt a strong sense of being both known and fully accepted, what was that like? What did the experience show you? 

chapter 2: something isn't working

1. Allen's headaches seemed to come out of nowhere, but at the time, he was facing significant challenges personally and professionally. Can you relate to health issues that most likely were connected to extreme circumstances you were facing? 
2. When Allen slows down to take a good, hard look, he's stunned to realize that his company is broken, starting at the top. Imagine you're Allen's friend, and you're meeting with him over coffee. How would you want to be a friend in that situation? If the moment was right, what encouraging story from your own life could you share with him? 
3. Pain drove Allen to consider stepping away from the very career he'd given his life to. Have you ever walked away from a job or something in your life that you felt defined you? How did you feel doing so? 
4. Competitive, goal-oriented guys famously don't know when to quit—whether at the end of the day, or the week, or in the grip of a health crisis. Would you say this is true, or mostly true, for you? If yes, how has that affected you?
5. Allen determined he needed a sabbatical to get to the bottom of what was going on in his life. While you may not have the ability to call a full time-out, would you consider setting time aside in your life with the specific purpose of gaining clarity? What might that look like?

chapter 3: waking up to what's inside

1. In your family of origin, how were you taught to relate to your feelings? What was modeled to you? 
2. A group facilitator pressed Allen to notice the inconsistencies between *what he said he wanted* and *what he actually did*. Have you seen this disconnect playing out in your life? If so, how?
3. Like many men, Allen found it hard to connect with his feelings. But he learned there was tremendous value in doing so. Would you say you (a) more often feel scared or (b) more often feel angry? How does that emotion show up in your actions and relationships?
4. Allen tells the story of the annual Christmas party, when his daughter is upstairs seriously ill. Allen and his wife are downstairs busy hosting. Allen decides to delegate his daughter's care to a friend who is a nurse, checking on her only when the party is over. What were you thinking and feeling while Allen was telling this story? Have you ever been so disconnected from your primary relationships that you failed to understand the seriousness of a circumstance? Why do you think that was the case? 
5. Allen encounters what he calls a "circle of grace" at an AA meeting. He describes it as "a loving, honest, compassionate and empathetic community. No judgment, criticism, or how-to-fix-it advice. Just broken people like me sharing honestly about their struggles." Have you ever experienced what Allen describes? If not, what would you be willing to risk to experience it? 

chapter 4: troubling revelations

1. Codependence can be a difficult behavior to understand—and even more difficult to recognize in ourselves. Have you ever felt you were working harder on a friend's or family member's issues than they were? Describe what that looked like and how you felt about your choices. 
2. How much of your impulse to help others would you say comes from your need for affirmation or praise?
3. Allen defines addictions as “anything that hurts us or those we love that we keep on doing anyway.” Leaving aside substances for the moment, where do you see addictive behavior or tendencies in your life? 
4. Allen draws a direct link between repeated sacrifices for another person and the emotion of resentment. How would you rate your familiarity with resentment?
 - a. “Ridiculously familiar. Seems like it's my go-to poison.”
 - b. “Very familiar at times in my life.”
 - c. “Not very familiar. I don't think I am all that vulnerable to resentment.”
 - d. “Not familiar at all. I make a point of not keeping a ledger on how people treat me.”
5. You, your wife, your family all benefit from your hard work. You, your wife, your family also all think you work too hard and long. What's a guy to do? What are ways that you try to resolve the conflict? And how is that working for you? 

chapter 5: crashing into the past

1. In this chapter, Allen reaches back to tell his family story, going back to his Grandpa Jack. What he sees is an incredible drive to succeed that was originally fueled by hunger and want. He concludes, “We could almost say our past writes our present.” What did your family of origin teach you, directly or indirectly, about dealing with anger? About dealing with fear? How do you see your past playing out in your story now?
2. He writes, “Emotional injury becomes an inheritance passed down intentionally or unintentionally—and often both—from father, to son, to grandson.” Are you aware of a wound or wounds that you have inherited from your father? 
3. Later in the chapter, Allen identifies “I am not enough” as one of his inherited messages. Can you identify messages handed down to you? How have they shaped / how are they shaping your career and relationships? 
4. Allen tells the story of crashing in an aircraft he was piloting while flying friends to a wedding. The story starts out as a rollicking adventure tale of a brave young pilot. But by the end of the chapter—and with the passage of time—other meanings surface. What are they?
5. As you reflect on your life story, what emotions or themes do you see running through it? Has the meaning of a significant event in your life shifted with time and perspective? If so, how? 

chapter 6: journey into the shadow

1. Our shadow self, Jung said, describes the part of our subconscious mind where we hide away taboo or unwanted thoughts, memories, feelings, and desires. What was your initial reaction to the thought that this might be true for you? 
2. Have you tended to view your conscious beliefs, convictions, and commitments as what really defines you? If so, where would you say that life outlook came from?
3. Allen describes how our shadow plays a role in helping us initially cope with early childhood wounds that we didn't have the capacity to process at the time. If left alone and not brought to light, those unhealed places can have significant impact on how we behave in our current everyday lives. Can you think of childhood circumstances that might have played a role in unwanted behaviors you're experiencing today? 
4. Allen writes, "In the light of awareness and acceptance, the shadow loses power to do harm." What might your life look like if the shadow began losing power?
5. According to Kimberly Fosu, "We lash out at people for the behaviors we don't like in ourselves." Agree or disagree? Explain. 

chapter 7: when good men fall

1. Allen writes that for leaders around midlife, the weight of their unexamined shadow can become unbearable. He uses the image of a beach ball bursting to the surface to describe how life events that have been repressed or kept secret can suddenly burst into the open, causing great damage. In what ways have you seen this dynamic play out in your life? 
2. About leaders, Allen says, “Because we live in the spotlight, we go to extremes to protect our public image. Which isn’t us, of course—it’s just our persona or social face we present to the world.” How would an observer describe your public persona? How do you protect your public image? How might your persona be negatively affecting you personally? 
3. Allen shares how painful it was for him when the double life of a longtime friend and Christian leader came to light. Where have you experienced betrayal? Describe what that felt like. Can you identify a time when someone may have felt you were the betrayer? If so, how did that make you feel?
4. Look again at Allen’s retelling of the film *Chocolat*, page 119. Describe a time when you were outed for compromising behavior. Did you encounter a grace-filled friend who accepted your humanity and helped you recover?
5. In this chapter, Allen shares five questions he wrestled with. As he explores the fourth question, he offers two kinds of transparency that can help us stay off the “burned list.” Explain each. Which of the two most reflects your life right now? 

chapter 8: breaking free from toxic emotions

1. Keeping things real, Allen opens the chapter with painful admissions surrounding the disintegration of his first marriage. Which part of his account evoked the strongest reaction in you, and why?
2. He concludes, “If we fail to make that connection between old wounds and intense emotion now, these powerful feelings can drive our lives in ways we will come to regret.” What powerful feelings have you had in the past six months that might be connected to old wounds, perhaps from your childhood? How did the wounds happen, and what was the recent impact? 
3. Consider the combat and revenge movies that boys and men typically enjoy. Why do you think acting out in anger and violence—even just watching it on the screen—can feel so satisfying to a guy? 
4. Allen identifies shame as one of four powerful negative emotions for men. Where do you think most of us initially learned to feel shame? Do you think guys who grow up in church are especially susceptible to shame? Give examples to support your view. 
5. Allen admits that letting go of resentments and anger surrounding the breakup of his first marriage was not a onetime thing but a process of him letting go—only to reach for the grievance again. Can you relate? What has helped you the most to keep moving toward reconciliation and acceptance?

chapter 9: circle of trust

1. Let's say you're invited to attend the kind of men's group discussed in this chapter. The friend inviting you says, "It's so great. We really get honest." How are you most likely to feel when you first get the invitation? After sleeping on it? After you talk it over with your wife? 
2. Allen says, "A man who's committed to reaching peak performance is most likely to achieve it in the company of others striving for the same goal." What do you say? What do you think the benefits might be of sharing your journey with other men and being let into theirs as well?
3. Good leaders pay close attention to group dynamics. Have you paid close attention to the persona you convey in a group? If someone else described your persona in a group (one you're not leading), what would they likely say? Have you asked a colleague to do that for you? 
4. For a group to be purposefully transformational, Allen says, it must "regularly affirm our mutual guarantee of confidentiality." Have you ever experienced the kind of absolute trust in a small group that allows for each member to be truly authentic? If so, what was the impact of that experience?
5. In your own words, describe the process of a clearing. In a situation where a group member is feeling bruised and disrespected, what benefits would you expect from using such a process? What risks? What value would you expect if you applied the general principles of clearing in your everyday life? 

chapter 10: everything that matters

1. Allen writes, “The goal of this book has been to motivate you to do the hard work of uncovering your true self: of looking deep inside for clues to what drives us—and sometimes drives us wrong.” In just a few words, describe what you’ve realized about your true self that you didn’t know before. 
2. As a result of your new insight, is there something in your life that you hope is possible now that didn’t seem so before? What might that look like if you were to pursue it? 
3. Allen writes, “My power is greatest when I am directly connected to my passion.” When you sense you are losing the joy of your “original fire,” what do you do to regain it?
4. As Allen acknowledges, most men struggle at times to identify why we’re on earth. How do you define your purpose? Is your purpose directly connected to your passion? When you think of your passion, do you think first of your work life or do you connect it more to other parts of your life? If both, do you see a connection between them?
5. Allen realizes that living for people is where his passion and purpose come together. Where would you say your passion and purpose come together? What does (or could) that feel like for you? What are some outcomes that you could visualize? Could that be your life mission? 

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