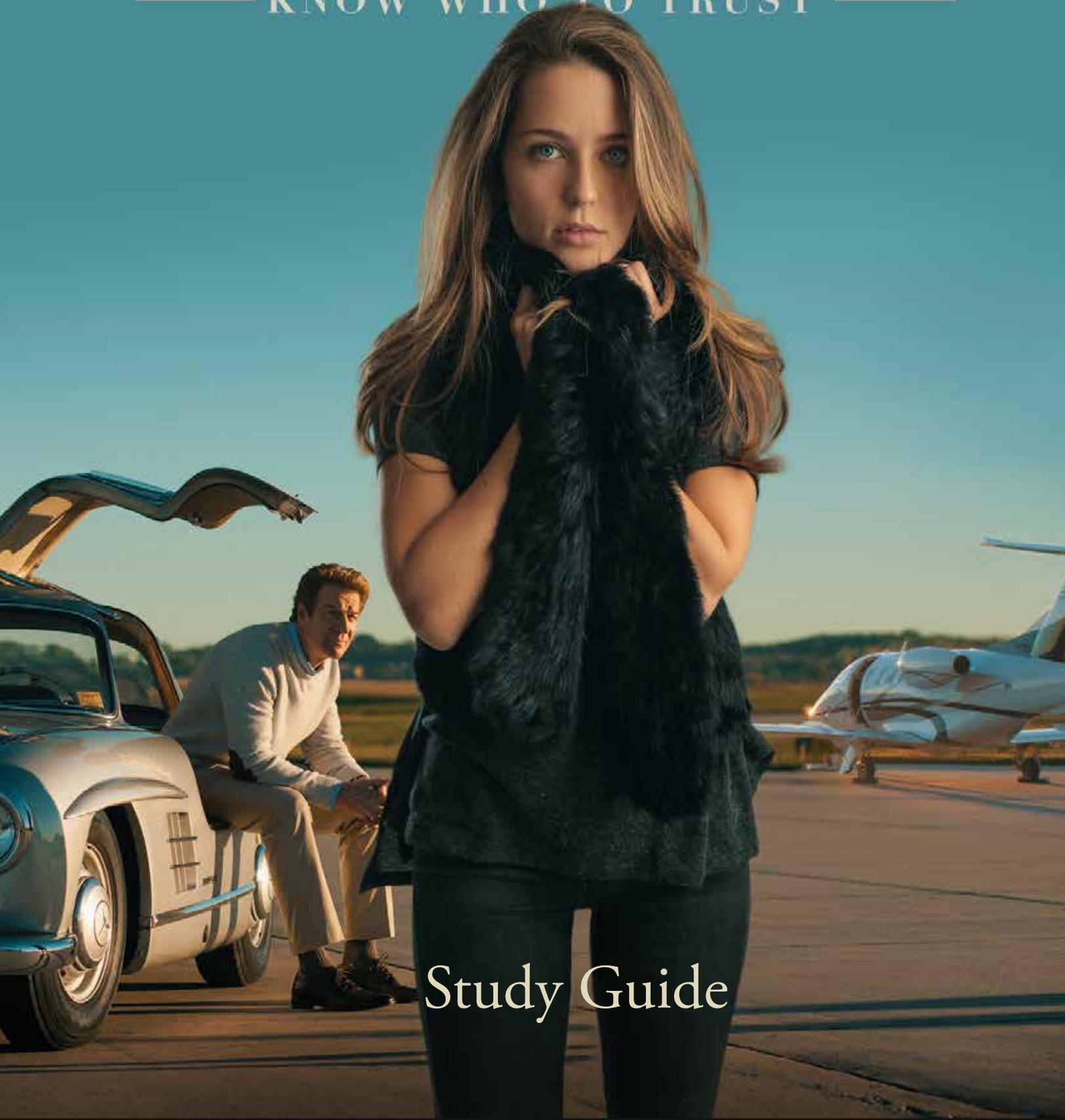


Trust Fund

— KNOW WHO TO TRUST —



Study Guide

— The Story —

Trust Fund's story of two sisters is inspired by the prodigal son parable, found in Luke 15. There are two basic ways people try to find happiness and fulfillment: moral conformity and self-discovery. Both are looking for personal significance and worth. Both are lost. The story of the Prodigal Son was for an audience of tax collectors and sinners, the "younger brother" and Pharisees, who studied and obeyed the Scripture, they worshiped faithfully and prayed constantly, they were the "older brother." The story demonstrates just how different each group's response was to Jesus. He was making the point to the Pharisees that they were trying to be religious and perfect, but that's not what matters to him. His love is unconditional. It's not about what you've done because no matter how hard you try, you can't be good enough.

— The Characters —



Mr. Donahue "the father"

Forgiving

Loves both of his children, wants to give them much more than they deserve.



Audrey "the older sister"

Moral Conformity

Puts the standards of God and community above her own individual fulfillment, in an effort to measure up.



Reese "the younger sister"

Self-Discovery

Feels she must be free to pursue her own goals, regardless of the barriers standing in her way.

Reese often lives in a dream world, thinking about her time in Italy with Milo; convinced this can't be all her life is meant to be, shuffling papers in a cubicle. When Audrey belittles her, and accuses her of not doing anything in front of their co-workers, she's frustrated beyond words. It's not that she doesn't try, she just doesn't try that hard. She knows her time would be better spent somewhere else, with someone else. This incident wasn't just hurtful, but it pushed Reese over the edge to take the money and run, now she feels justified in her actions.



DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA?

LUKE 15:11-12 (NIV)

11 Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

RIGHT TO THE POINT

The younger son asks his father for his share of the inheritance, which in that culture was the same as saying, "I wish you were dead." The younger brother knew he would inherit the money one day, so why not now?

Just like the younger brother, Reese is set for life and her future looks promising, but she's restless, she thinks she's missing out. She takes her inheritance, thinking her mother wanted her to have it. She's just not willing to wait for her father's timing, she doesn't trust him. Have you ever gotten impatient waiting on God? Even the right thing can be wrong if it's not at the right time.





DEEP THOUGHTS

Both Reese and the younger brother betray their fathers. Completely ignoring the generous character of her father, Reese thinks her father is trying to keep something from her. But he had a better plan for her.

Try looking further than Reese's actions, look at why she did what she did. She was hurting. Not only the loss of her mother, but her sister's judgemental attitude had left her with wounds she wanted to escape.

Put yourself in Reese's place, can you imagine what it was like always living in the shadow of an "older brother/sister" always being reminded of your failures? Maybe that's part of what drove her and the younger brother away. Maybe that's why people leave the church.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Why wasn't she satisfied with what she already had? What was she looking for?

Have you ever questioned why God wouldn't give you what you wanted, when you wanted it?

What kind of relationship do you think she had with her father?

How are the two siblings different? and how are they alike?

How often do we let others determine our attitude? Are we offended easily?

When you're hurt by someone, or by circumstances, do you take your frustrations out on someone else?

Audrey had absolutely no compassion for her sister. She was much too eager to go to her father with the news of what her sister had done, suggesting they track her down. Not for her sister's own good, not to restore her, but to get the money back. Audrey was focused on one thing, what Reese had done wrong. She didn't try and explain to her father what Reese might be thinking, or why she had done what she'd done. When her father wouldn't go along with her plan she decides to take matters into her own hands. Much like the way we do with God.



I'M NOT TRACKING DOWN YOUR SISTER LIKE SHE'S A CRIMINAL.

LUKE 15:13-17

13 "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

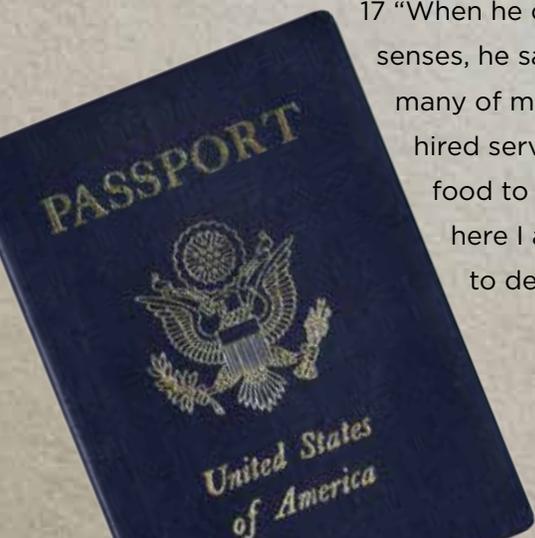
17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!

RIGHT TO THE POINT

We know what the younger brother was doing, he's "squandering" his wealth in wild living! But what's happening at home?

It wasn't that the father didn't want his son to have the inheritance, but not this way. His heart is torn apart. He hurt so much, it overshadows his loss of property or money. The father patiently endures a tremendous loss of honor and I'm guessing he feels rejected by his son. But none of that matters, he only wants his son to come home. When things are bad, what's important comes into focus, and it's not material things.

It would have been easy to have an attitude of "good riddance" but that's not what Jesus teaches, he says, We should be going after the lost, the one that doesn't deserve it. Religion struggles with mercy, but Jesus says, "He that is forgiven much should also forgive much."



DEEP THOUGHTS

When Christianity began, it was a non-religion. The religious were offended by Jesus' teaching, but the sinners were attracted to his message.

Today many see Christianity as "religion" and moralism and a growing number of people consider themselves not just non-religious, but they oppose religion of any kind. Sometimes causing those claiming moral authority to "dig in" as they attempt to, "take back the culture."

Criticize or distance yourself from one way of life, and immediately everyone assumes you have chosen to follow the other. Both of these paths are dividing everyone into two groups. Both blaming the other for the problems in the world today. It doesn't matter if it's a social issue, religion, how we raise our children, or what we eat, everyone wants to tell you what you should be doing and if you don't agree with them, you must not only be wrong, but against them.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Why do you think Audrey didn't want to help Reese?

Which brother or sister are you?

Would you have compassion or condemnation?

Can you see the younger and older brother today?

Why do you think the Pharisees were opposed to Jesus' teachings?

How do you think the average person defines the word "sin"?

What do you think Jesus says about that?



Like, the younger son, Reese had sinned so much, but when she came home all the Father wanted to do was celebrate her return. He didn't want to lecture her about what she'd done wrong or punish her.



DADDY CAN I COME HOME?

LUKE 15:18-24

18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants. 20 So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. 21 "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. 22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

RIGHT TO THE POINT

This is where it gets good, right? The son realizes he wants to go home, if his dad will have him as a hired hand. You can picture the father watching and waiting, hoping today is the day his son will return. The violins swell as they embrace and we can all go home.

Many people end the story as a sweet homecoming for the younger brother. But wait there's more. The father goes out of his way, in an unthinkable act of restoration, he restores his wayward son to his position as if nothing has happened. This is wonderful, and everyone should be happy now.

DEEP THOUGHTS

What a beautiful scene, let's face it, it's cinematic gold. Rembrandt and Shakespeare both found inspiration in this beautiful story. But what if the return is not the only point. Maybe it's not just about the son deciding to come home and the father's forgiveness. Not that it's not enough, because it is. But let's look just a little deeper. Why would God choose to restore him after he'd done so much wrong?

The moral depravity in the younger sibling is easy to see, but was the moral depravity really the "sin" or is putting yourself in the place of God the sin?

Reese's sin is easy to see on screen. It's physical, it's of the flesh, but what about the sin that's in her heart, the sin that took her away from her father? And the change in her heart is what brought her back. She no longer wanted to live on her own terms, but wanted to come back to live in her father's house.

Audrey's lifestyle of performance looks good, she's respectable and socially accepted. Let's face it, she's doing lots of good things. She's giving to charity and she works hard. It's her heart that trips her up. When we put ourselves in the place of God, we are lost. And there are no degrees of lost, without Jesus we are all lost.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Which one of the brothers, or sisters, is lost?

Do you think one is more lost than the other?

Which one would you rather be?





Reese has asked her sister for forgiveness, but Audrey is still bitter. She can't understand why her father would so quickly forget about everything Reese has done. She's worked so hard to earn her father's love and favor, his reaction towards her sister hardly seems fair. Why should they trust Reese anyway? Do you ever question the way God is blessing others? Do they deserve it?

WHILE SHE WAS GONE, I WAS HERE WORKING.

LUKE 15:25-32

25 “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27 ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ 28 “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ 31 “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

RIGHT TO THE POINT

But the stories still not over. Not even close. You have to know the rest of the story. If you don't you're overlooking the whole point. It's the older brother's response. See, he never went off and lived a rebellious life, he never embarrassed his family, but when his younger brother came home, his response, was pride, jealousy, and greed. He wouldn't celebrate his brother's return because he couldn't understand how his father could forgive him so quickly, without any retribution.

You would think he'd be thrilled his little brother is home. If for no other reason, he knows how much it means to his father. But he's not thinking of his father, or anyone but himself. He's greedy and prideful. He liked being the only son around, the “good” one. He certainly doesn't want to share his portion of the inheritance and I don't think he wants to share his father's affection. He's jealous. Who's acting like the “baby” now?

The father just keeps on giving. Parenthood will often test you, it will take you to the edge and see if you can still love. This father only had grace for his children. His eldest son, although he had never left his father's house, had disrespected him, he had insulted him in public. Instead of getting what he deserved at this moment, his father begs him to come inside.



DEEP THOUGHTS

When the older brother says, “You never threw me a party,” he questions the father’s love for him. Older brothers, and in this case sisters, are insecure. Comparing their behaviour to others and looking down on other’s life choices makes them feel superior, and qualified to point out other’s flaws.

Jesus’ strongest rebukes were for those trying to earn God’s love through their actions, instead of grace. John 3:3, Jesus says, “Unless you are born again you will not inherit the Kingdom of God.” All your good works are not going to get you anywhere.

Just like the older brother, Audrey couldn’t bare the thought that her father might be giving Reese a promotion, instead of making her pay for what she’d done. She has no faith in her father, in his wisdom or judgement, she doesn’t trust she’ll be taken care of.

“All these years I’ve slaved for you” the older son was only laboring for what it would get him, it wasn’t about his relationship with his father, but about what it would get him. When you expect your goodness to pay off, and it doesn’t, there is confusion and anger. Selfishness, ambition, and performance gives us a sense of self-reliance, which gets in the way of a relationship with God.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Do you feel you are owed more than you are getting when life isn’t going your way at the moment?

How do people try and control God through their obedience?

If God’s grace is free and we can’t earn it, what’s our motivation to live an obedient life?

If your motivation for doing good is to earn God’s favor, how does that affect the goodness of the action?



In the end, we find the prodigal story is about every one of us. In our brokenness, we are all trying to come home, and the only way that is possible, is not by our own works, but through God's unbelievable grace for us.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

Romans 3:10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one."

Luke 18:14 Jesus says, "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."



INFLUENCES

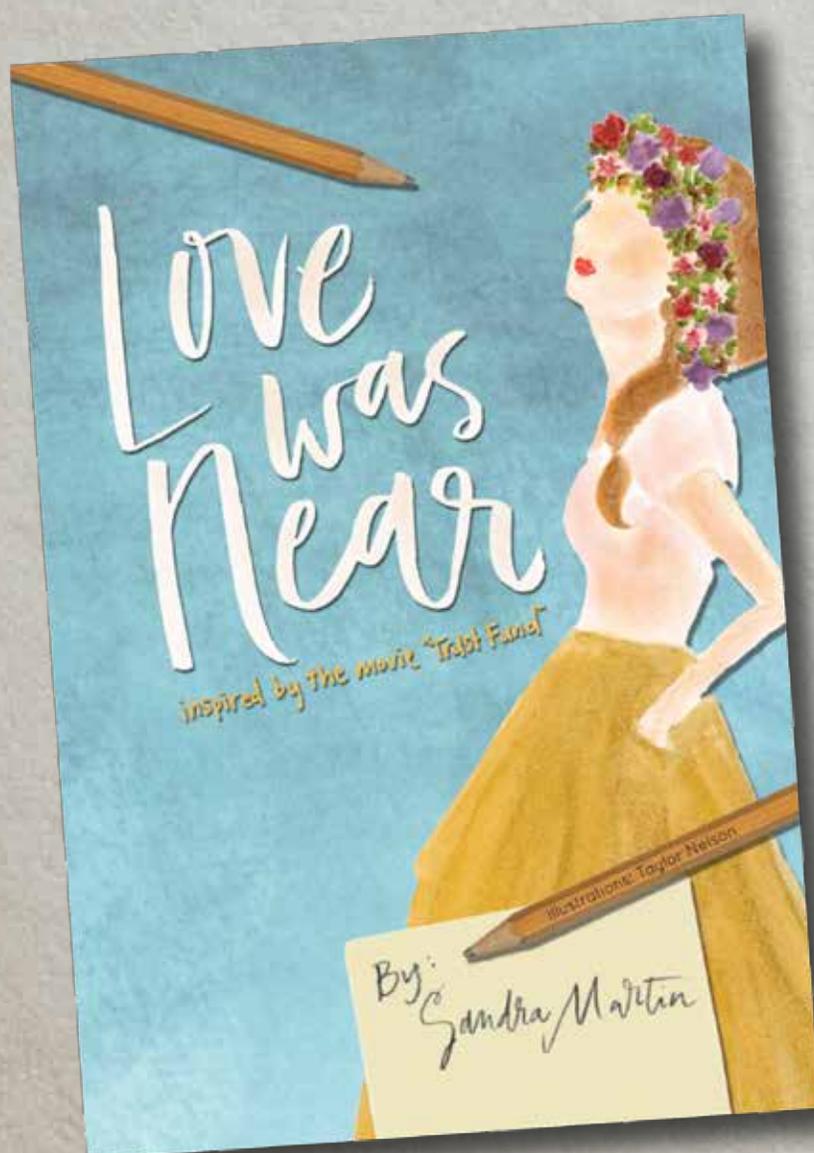
Timothy Keller's book, "Prodigal God", has had great influence on the movie, Trust Fund and this discussion guide. I highly recommend that you read it, and then read it again!

Scripture - New Internation Version

Companion book to

Trust Fund

for young adult women.



“Here is where my story begins, a broken girl who feels like screaming, but instead is silent.”

Reese invites us to join her on a very personal journey as she shares with us her everyday struggles and answers our questions of who did what and why. Leading us to questions about our own identity, purpose, and life plan. Don't worry about having the right answers; there are none. Just be honest, if not for you, for the future you; It's your story!