

# A PAST THAT LIES BEFORE ME

A University Professor's Memoir/Exposé  
of Being Arrested, Entangled  
in the Criminal Justice System,  
Loss, Jail, and Unexpected Blessings

STEVE CLARK, PhD

## BOOK CLUB KIT

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Everything you need to host an engaging book club for *A Past That Lies Before Me*

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# Book Club Facilitator's Guide for *A Past That Lies Before Me*

## Goals

- Encourage open, nonjudgmental discussion
- Explore themes of justice, forgiveness, mental health, and rebirth
- Connect personal experience to the memoir's deeper questions

## Session Structure (Recommended 60–90 minutes)

### 1. Opening (10 minutes)

- Welcome attendees
- Share the book summary
- Invite participants to share one word summarizing their reaction to the book

### 2. Read a Short Excerpt (Optional, 5 minutes)

Suggested excerpts:

- The arrest scene (Chapter 1)
- The “Entanglement System” explanation (Chapter 3)
- The jail spiritual turning point (Chapter 12)

### 3. Guided Discussion (30–45 minutes)

Use 5–7 questions from the list discussion questions included.

Include at least one personal-reflection question.

### 4. Thematic Activity (10–15 minutes)

Choose from the activity ideas.

### 5. Closing Reflection (5–10 minutes)

- Ask: “*What does this book challenge you to reconsider about justice or compassion?*”
- Encourage final thoughts.

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## Social Media Sharing Instructions:

Encourage book clubs and readers to share their experience:

### How to Share

- Post a photo of your book club gathering, your copy of the book, or a favorite quote.
- Share your reflections on a moment from the book that surprised or moved you.
- Tag your local bookstore or library if you discovered the book there.
- Use the custom hashtag (below).

### Suggested Captions

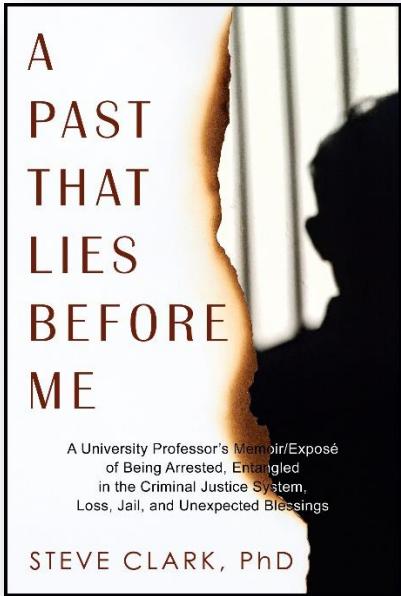
- “This memoir opened my eyes to the human stories behind the justice system.”
- “Reading *A Past That Lies Before Me* reminded me that grace shows up in unexpected places.”
- “Our book club had one of our deepest conversations yet.”

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## Book Club Discussion Questions for *A Past That Lies Before Me*

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*A Past That Lies Before Me* is Steve Clark's unflinchingly honest memoir about the collapse and rebuilding of his life after a criminal mistake upends his career, reputation, and relationships. Once a respected university professor, Clark finds himself arrested for stalking an ex-girlfriend—a choice born of anger, despair, and emotional unraveling. As he enters what he later calls the *Entanglement System*, he confronts the frightening world of holding cells, arraignments, cold jail pods, bureaucratic indifference, and the stigma of a felony conviction.

Inside the county jail, Clark meets fellow inmates whose humanity and struggles open his eyes to suffering beyond his own. He faces depression, loss, the destruction of his professional life, the end of a loving relationship, and public humiliation—including being inaccurately linked in the media to unrelated crimes by other university faculty.

But amid the pain, jail also presents unexpected blessings: friendships, acts of compassion, spiritual renewal, and the astonishing encouragement of a homeless man whose words shift Clark's perspective and help save his life. Through injustice, grace, punishment, and unlikely redemption, he discovers that his past is not behind him—it lies before him, woven into every step of who he becomes.

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### Discussion Questions

- Steve emphasizes that “a criminal never stops paying for his crime.” How does the book challenge or support the idea of redemption in American society?
- In what ways does Steve hold himself accountable, and where does he struggle with self-forgiveness?
- Which relationships in the memoir—Sally, Lisa, Ray, fellow inmates—shaped Steve’s trajectory the most, and why?
- How does the book explore the fragility or resilience of trust?
- How does Steve’s concept of the “Entanglement System” reflect his experiences with law enforcement, bureaucracy, and jail conditions?
- What parts of his description of jail were most surprising or eye-opening?
- Psalm 1 opens the book. How does this set the tone for Steve’s reflections?
- Were the spiritual and emotional turning points believable and meaningful to you?
- Both Steve and people around him—like Carl—struggle with despair. What does the memoir say about mental health and the ways people cope?
- If you were in Steve’s shoes—or Sally’s—how might you have reacted differently?
- Should society do more to help reintegrate people after jail, even for “low-level” felonies?

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## Book Club Playlist for *A Past That Lies Before Me*

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A book with themes of loss, reflection, spirituality, and redemption pairs well with a contemplative playlist.  
Suggested tracks:

1. “*Hurt*” – Johnny Cash
2. “*Fix You*” – Coldplay
3. “*Amazing Grace*” – Traditional (various versions)
4. “*Demons*” – Imagine Dragons
5. “*The Cave*” – Mumford & Sons
6. “*I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For*” – U2
7. “*Broken*” – Lifehouse
8. “*Rise Up*” – Andra Day
9. “*Walk*” – Foo Fighters
10. “*Three Little Birds*” – Bob Marley (for the joyful, hopeful moments)

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# Themed Book Club Meeting Ideas for *A Past That Lies Before Me*

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## ***The Entanglement Experience Discussion Night***

Theme: Exploring justice, compassion, and redemption

- **Activity:** Write one anonymous “unexpected blessing” from your life; place in a bowl and read aloud.
- **Food:**
  - **Comfort-Food Chili Bar** – representing warmth after hardship
  - **Cornbread Muffins**
  - **Hot cocoa or herbal tea** (a contrast to the cold jail “pea-green” environment)

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## ***Professor to Pastor Introspection Night***

Theme: Reflection and personal growth

- **Activity:** Journaling session followed by group sharing
- **Food:**
  - **Mediterranean Mezze Platter** – nod to Sally’s Turkish/Irish blend of heritage (mentioned in the book)
  - Hummus, pita, olives, dolmas, fresh veggies
  - **Irish Apple Cake** for dessert

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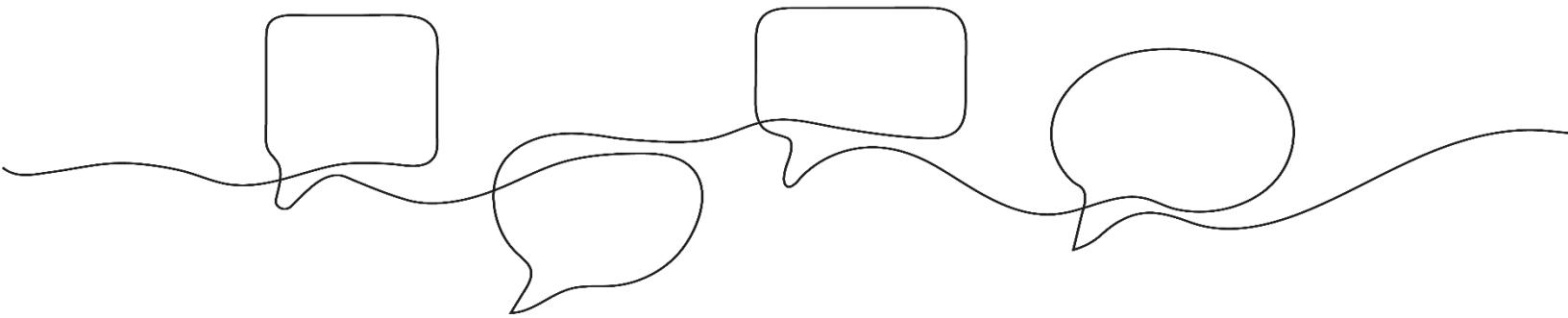
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## ***Pod Life Real-Talk Night***

Theme: Understanding jail conditions and humanizing inmates

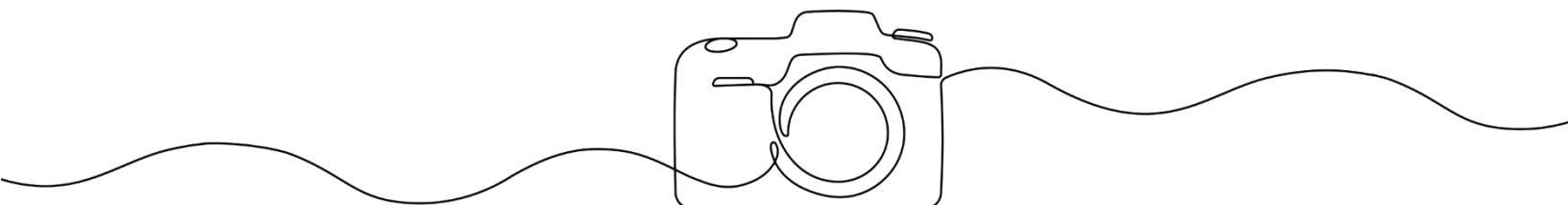
- **Activity:** Bring one item representing comfort that inmates don’t have; discuss why it matters.
- **Food:**
  - **Upgraded “Commissary Snacks”**
    1. Gourmet ramen
    2. Trail mix
    3. Chocolate bars
    4. Sparkling water
  - **“Cold Pod” Salad Bowls** (fresh greens, apples, cheese, nuts)
- ***Jetstream Gin Fizz*** – Sparkling lemonade with a splash of gin or ginger ale and fresh mint

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Thank you for reading and discussing *A Past That Lies Before Me* with your club!

If you enjoyed the story, your voice can help others discover it too. A quick review on Amazon or Goodreads would mean the world—even a few words make a big difference!



**I'd love to see your book club in action!**

Snap a photo of your group reading or discussing *A Past That Lies Before Me* and share it on social media! Use #APastThatLiesBeforeUs so I can celebrate with you!