



Book Club Set

# Things I Learned From Falling

By Claire Nelson

## About the Author



Claire Nelson is a New Zealand-born writer who has spent more than a decade in London working in food and travel journalism, including more than five years at Jamie Oliver's magazine. She has also written for *Elle*, *Food and Travel*, *Trek & Mountain*, *Lodestars Anthology*, and *Westjet Canada*. *Things I Learned from Falling* is her first book. She lives in Toronto.

Retrieved from: <https://readinggroupchoices.com/books/things-i-learned-from-falling/>

## About the Book



In 2018, writer Claire Nelson made international headlines when she fell over 25 feet after wandering off the trail in a deserted corner of Joshua Tree. The fall shattered her pelvis, rendering her completely immobile. There Claire lay for the next four days, surrounded by boulders that muffled her cries for help, but exposed her to the relentless California sun above. Her rescuers had not expected to find her alive.

In *Things I Learned From Falling* Claire tells not only her story of surviving, but also her story of falling. What led this successful thirty-something to a desert trail on the other side of the globe from her home where no one knew she would be that day? At once the unbelievable story of an impossible event, and the human journey of a young woman wrestling with the agitation of past and anxiety of future.

Retrieved from: <https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/48717952>

## Discussion Questions



1. In the Things I Learned From Falling, Claire Nelson recounts her story of survival through physical, mental, and emotional endurance after falling 25 feet in Joshua Tree National Park, California. What experience, if any, do you have that might help you better relate to Claire's narrative? If not through recalling a literal fall, what metaphorical "fall" could you call upon? Discuss the similarities and differences of experiencing and recovering from a literal and metaphorical fall.
2. Claire confesses on page 21, "I knew my friends were right to warn me about the risks of being out here on my own and I nodded gravely, talking in their stories. But, somehow, I didn't think they applied to me." How often do you find yourself in a similar mindset when encountering stories of survival like that of Claire's? Do you believe falling (both literally and figuratively) can be avoided if we are simply aware and careful? Or is falling an inevitable part of life? Discuss.
3. Before encountering the moment she slipped and fell, Claire notes in hindsight, "Confidence breeds complacency." Share a time when you've made the mistake of overlooking risk due to displayed confidence. What are your reflections on this experience in hindsight? What advice would you have for the version of you at that time, and do you believe you would've taken said advice? Why, or why not?
4. From struggling to ask for help in her everyday life, to being left in a position where she was desperately in need of it, Claire was forced to learn what it meant to depend entirely on oneself - and the cost it would take. Put yourself in Claire's shoes, and consider what your biggest takeaway would be on the independence between ourselves and others in life. Does asking for help signify weakness or strength? Why do you believe so?
5. Desperate to leave a message behind in preparation for the worst, Claire uses her camera to document her thoughts for her friends and family. At first, she finds herself struggling to bear her vulnerability and maintains a "tough-it-out" tone throughout. Why do you think this was so? What was Claire attempting to prevent - to protect - by maintaining emotional distance? Would you have gone about your "final" message the same way or differently? Discuss.

6. Loneliness is a theme commonly touched upon throughout the book. Both through the lens of Claire's survival through the empty desert, and during her struggle with a sense of disconnection to the world prior to her fall. Which scenario affects you more viscerally? Share your experiences, if any, that could help you relate to either of Claire's encounters with isolation.
7. Facing potential death, Claire contemplates her life experiences leading up to her fateful fall. When asking herself if she had any regrets, she responded surly, "No. Not really." If given the chance, what memories would you ponder over during the last moments of your life? Is there anything you'd wish to have done differently? Or would you be mostly clear of regrets, like Claire?
8. Holding tightly to a hard-earned identity of being headstrong, unconstrained, and independent, our protagonist finds herself wrestling with her deepest and most vulnerable needs as a human being - "connection, love and affection." (page 146) Like Claire we are all "never just one person." What different parts of you feel most contradictory to one another? How do we reconcile who we want to be with who we know we truly are? In what moments or settings in your life do you feel completely aligned between these two versions of yourself?
9. On page 164, Claire questions, "Why spend your life preparing when you can spend it living? Then again, what happens when you go out there and live unprepared and everything falls away?" Discuss what your response would be and why. Would you rather be overly cautious in life and lose out on experiences to-be-had, or would you rather take the risk and live life to its fullest?
10. After enduring four days alone in the desert, Claire is reduced and vows to live a new life: one of emotional openness. As Rumi says, "The wound is the place where the light enters your." Like Claire, have you ever experienced a life changing event that caused a re-examination and transformation in a way of living? In what ways do you think Claire's experiences will stay with her throughout her life? In what ways has her story of survival and reflections on human connection inspire you to live your own life?

## Other Links and Resources



- Watch video from Claire stranded in the desert:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=977&v=cQ7snRNkl80&embeds\\_referring\\_euri=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dclaire%2Bnelson%26oq%3DClaire%2BNelson%26ags%3Dchrome.0.0i355i512j46i512j0i512i5j69i60.340j0j7%26sourceid%3Dchro&source\\_ve\\_path=MTM5MTE3LDEzOTExNywxMzkyMTcsMTM5MTE3LDIzODUx&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=977&v=cQ7snRNkl80&embeds_referring_euri=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dclaire%2Bnelson%26oq%3DClaire%2BNelson%26ags%3Dchrome.0.0i355i512j46i512j0i512i5j69i60.340j0j7%26sourceid%3Dchro&source_ve_path=MTM5MTE3LDEzOTExNywxMzkyMTcsMTM5MTE3LDIzODUx&feature=emb_title)
- Interview of Claire's Story: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdcl5usHXY>

## Share your thoughts with other readers!



DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

BOOK CLUB: \_\_\_\_\_

BOOK TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

As a group we rated this book:

1	2	3	4	5
Ugh!		It was OK...		Loved it!

Would we recommend this book to other book clubs?

Yes          No          Undecided

Why/why not?

Our discussion: