



Swim, Ride, Run, Breathe

How I Lost A Triathlon And Caught My Breath

About the Book

One winter, Jennifer Garrison Brownell, who describes herself as a “mid-life pastor, wife of a seriously disabled man and dedicated non-athlete,” decided almost on a whim to train for and run a sprint triathlon. In the process, she was surprised to discover that her spirit was as transformed as her body.

About this Guide

In Swim, Ride, Run, Breathe: How I Lost A Triathlon and Caught My Breath, Jennifer describes that transformation with humor and without sentimentality. This guide is for groups and individuals who want to dig deeper into the themes of the book. Have questions? Ideas? Stories of your own adventures? Keep the conversation going by visiting Jennifer on Facebook or at her website 46thpsalm.blogspot.com.

Reading Guide for Groups & Individuals

Part One, Swim

Jennifer’s triathlon experience begins in a swimming pool.

What is your favorite body of water (a lake? an ocean? a river? a pool? your bathtub?) and why?

In chapter 7, Jennifer describes learning to pray.

Do you remember learning to pray?

If you don’t pray, why not?

In chapter 10, Jennifer lists the things she has been afraid of.

How would your list be different?

How would it be the same?

“I swam like the tuba player blatted – terribly and exuberantly.”

Is there anything you allow yourself to be exuberant about, even if you do it terribly?

Body Bonus

Put your feet or hands in a basin of comfortably warm water. You may want to add a few drops of scented oil. Thank your feet or hands for their strength and beauty.

Bible Bonus

Read the story of Jonah. Use it as a springboard to write, pray, doodle or share with another about vocation, calling, mob rule, being inside a whale, and whether you’d rather run away from God or stay put and whine.

Part Two, Ride

In this section, we are introduced to MaryAnn McKibbon Dana’s idea that “sometimes the harder thing is the easier thing.”

Can you think of times when you have found this to be true in your own life?

Who helps you, and how?

In this section, we learn some family secrets. Family secrets can have a lot of power.

Do you think it’s a good idea to share family secrets, or a bad one?

Can you think of a secret that was kept?

Can you think of a secret that escaped?

Chapter 21 talks about caregiving someone with a physical disability.

Have you ever given or received care because of a disability?

What parts of giving or receiving care were easy for you?

What parts were difficult?

Body Bonus

Break a sweat.

Bible Bonus

Read the book of Ruth. Use it as spring board to write, pray, doodle or share with another about friendship, farming, poverty, sex, or that one ancestor who most fascinates or repels you.

About the Author

The daughter, granddaughter and great-granddaughter of ministers and missionaries, Rev. Jennifer Garrison Brownell has worked in a food cooperative, a museum, a school, an indy record label and even some churches. The book *A Million Visions of Peace: Wisdom from the Friends of Old Turtle*, which she co-edited, was a Children's Choice Award from the Children's Book Council of New York. Most recently, she contributed an essay to the book *There's a Woman in the Pulpit*. She lives in the suburbs of Portland, Oregon with her husband, son and two unruly pooches. You can find more of her writing at 46thpsalm.blogspot.com.

Part Three, Run

What is your first memory?

Why do you think you have held on to this one, when others have fallen away?

Have you ever been afflicted with the outsider complex? When and where?

What messages did you receive about your body as a child? As a teen? As a young adult?

How did you receive those messages?

Which messages would you like to let go of?

Which would you like to retain?

“It’s no accident...that grace is both the word for the way God works in the world, and the way our bodies move with the most ease and beauty.”

Do you experience this connection in your own life? Why or why not?

Body Bonus

Ask your body to do something new. Whether this is walking around the block, finally getting all the way into camel pose, or skydiving – thank your body for exhibiting courage and resilience. What new thing can you try tomorrow?

Bible Bonus

Read the story of Naaman in 2 Kings, chapter 5. Use the story as a spring board to write, pray, doodle or share with another about healing, royalty, rivers, power, or what you absolutely must do every day for the rest of your life.



Part Four, Breathe

When have you been out of breath, literally or metaphorically?

How did you catch your breath again?

Body Bonus

Today, notice your breathing at times you usually do not. What do you notice? Tomorrow, notice again. Does your breathing change just because you are paying attention?

Bible Bonus

The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. Job 33:4

Use these words as a spring board to write, pray, doodle or share with another about breath, Spirit, God, or what gives you life.