



Jodi Picoult

Book club discussion questions

Change of Heart

1. Discuss the irony of Kurt Nealon telling June that “people are never who you think they are”. (3)
2. Michael says it is easier to say someone deserves to die for what they did than it is to take the responsibility to make that happen. How do you think you would feel in his position? Have you ever been in that position?
3. After Shay is brought to I-tier, several “miracles” occur: Smythe’s baby is cured; the water changes to wine; Shay revives the robin; Lucuis’s AIDS is cured; the bubble gum is enough for all of them. Discuss the implications of each “miracle”.
4. Religions come about because of what people need at the time that they need them. (94) Do you agree or disagree?
5. What would be the hardest luxury to leave behind? (118)
6. Michael’s grandfather said “I thought God was supposed to love you unconditionally. Those sure sound like a lot of conditions to me (the

requirements of a true believer). (124)" Argue both sides of his statement.

7. Which character is the most real to us? Which one is easiest to relate to? Why?
8. Where do you stand on the issue of the death penalty? A vivid description of lethal injection is given on page 131. Has this book changed how you feel?
9. June's initial reaction is to refuse to a restorative justice meeting with Shay. How would you feel? What changes her mind?
10. "I'm just saying I'm right. I'm just saying if you're right, it still doesn't mean I'm wrong." Do you agree?
11. Consider and address June's questions on page 184. Would you give up your vengeance against someone you hate if it meant saving someone you loved? Would you want your dreams to come true if it meant granting your enemy's dying wish?
12. Why were all the inmates on I-tier energized by Shay's attempt to die on his own terms? (186)
13. Dr. Wu says what makes a heart worthy for transplant has nothing to do with the donor's personality. (200) Do you agree or disagree? By the end of the book, have you changed your mind?
14. The history of the Gnostic gospels is in *Change of Heart*. Given what you now know about them, does this change your opinion of the New Testament in any way? If so, why, and if not, why not?

15. We were introduced to Ian Fletcher in Keeping Faith. Has your opinion of Ian changed? How?
16. June says that it's her decision whether or not Claire should accept the heart – not Claire's. Do you agree?
17. "I don't belong to a religion. Religion's the reason the world's falling apart—did you see that guy get carted out of here? That's what religion does. It points a finger. It causes wars. It breaks apart countries. It's a petri dish for stereotypes to grown in. Religion's not about being holy," Shay said. "Just holier-than-thou."(341) The news offers many examples in today's world of how religion can be distorted to further violence or narrow-mindedness. Do you think the benefits of organized religion outweigh its potential caveats?
18. When Shay's chains fell to the floor, what was your reaction as a reader? Do you believe in miracles?
19. Discuss the irony of the various names in the novel: Dr. Christian Gallagher, Maggie Bloom, Shay's foster home of Bethlehem, NH, Joe Lynch, Warden Coyne, Father Michael Wright – and the title, CHANGE OF HEART.
20. Lucius's sarcoma comes back after it was "cured". What is the significance of the timing? Did this change your opinion of Shay's "power"?
21. Shay finally tells Michael what really happened to Elizabeth and Kurt Nealon on the night they died? Are you surprised? Do you believe Shay?
22. Grace tells June "How would you have felt if---when Elizabeth died--- someone told you that you can't have her back, but that part of her

could still be somewhere in the world. You may not know that part; you may not ever have contact with it---but you'd know it was out there, alive and well. Would you have wanted that?" Would you?

23. How does the preparation for Shay's execution take on a "showtime" quality? The "circus" atmosphere has been around earlier with the media. How are the two situations similar? How are they different?
24. Several of the characters' lives have intertwined: Calloway convicted of burning down a synagogue and Maggie's father taking over as rabbi at Temple Beth (held in the cafeteria because the synagogue had burned down); CO Smythe's baby was baptized by Father Michael and becomes one of Shay's miracles; Michael finding his stolen picture of his grandfather and Shay's involvement; Michael serving on the jury of Shay's murder trial and then becoming his spiritual advisor. Discuss.
25. What do you think is meant by the ending of the book?