



*By Dawn Kohler*

## About the Book

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The Messages is a memoir by Dawn Kohler that moves between two timelines: Southern California in the early 1990s, where a young businesswoman and mother is seized by a spiritual calling she never asked for, and June 2021, where Dawn reads her long-buried manuscript aloud to her daughter Katie on the eve of a family wedding.

Central to the memoir is a series of three nights of dictation Dawn receives from what she describes as the center of all creation — messages about the dawn of a new consciousness, the danger of following prejudice, and humanity’s capacity to choose a gentler future. These are the Messages that give the book its name.

*This guide is designed to help your book club move through the memoir’s most powerful themes, questions, and invitations — at whatever depth feels right for your group.*

## Primary Characters

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<b>Dawn</b>	The author and narrator — a practical businesswoman and mother of three who, in her early thirties, is overtaken by a spiritual calling she neither wanted nor expected. Her journey moves from depression and repressed trauma toward healing, wholeness, and a profound encounter with the divine.
<b>Jeff</b>	Dawn’s husband since high school — cheerful, loving, and often overwhelmed by circumstances beyond his control. Jeff’s loyalty and steadiness anchor the family through years of upheaval, even as his own wounds and needs go largely unmet.
<b>Anne</b>	Dawn’s first therapist — warm, deeply intuitive, and ultimately the catalyst for Dawn’s most important inner work. Anne’s departure becomes both a wound and a gift, forcing Dawn to internalize the love and trust she had placed in another.
<b>Judith</b>	Dawn’s second therapist — more direct and intellectually rigorous than Anne. Judith holds Dawn accountable, names difficult truths, and ultimately helps her close the most painful chapters of her process.

<b>Katie</b>	Dawn's youngest daughter, who becomes the present-day listener as Dawn reads aloud from her manuscript. Katie's questions and reactions give the memoir its frame — and underscore how the past lives in the people who carry it.
<b>Jen</b>	Dawn's eldest child — perceptive, warm, and unknowingly wise. Jen's simple observations about love, God, and her 'love box' arrive at exactly the right moments in the story.
<b>Isabella</b>	The family's El Salvadorean nanny — steadfast, loving, and quietly heroic. Isabella holds the household together during its darkest years with her own hard-won resilience.

## Major Themes

<b>1</b>	<p><b>The Calling &amp; the Awakening</b></p> <p>Dawn's story begins not with a choice but with a summons — a ball of energy in her chest that paralyzes her career, her marriage, and her sense of self. The memoir asks: what happens when something greater than us insists on being heard? And what do we lose, and gain, when we finally answer?</p>
<b>2</b>	<p><b>Childhood Trauma &amp; the Body's Memory</b></p> <p>The book makes visceral the way the body stores what the mind cannot bear to remember. Dawn's repressed abuse memories surface only when she is safe enough to hold them — and the physical sensations that accompany each revelation underscore that healing must be embodied, not merely understood.</p>
<b>3</b>	<p><b>Love, Transference &amp; the Inner Healer</b></p> <p>Dawn's relationship with Anne is the emotional heart of the memoir. Through it, the book explores how we project our unmet needs onto those who care for us, and how the love we feel for others is ultimately a reflection of something we carry within ourselves.</p>
<b>4</b>	<p><b>Faith, Surrender &amp; the Uncontrollable Path</b></p> <p>Time and again, Dawn is led by internal messages she did not generate and could not explain. The memoir explores the tension between a rational mind and an intelligence that operates beyond it — and what it means to follow a path you did not choose.</p>
<b>5</b>	<p><b>The Messages &amp; Collective Transformation</b></p> <p>The three nights of dictation Dawn receives represent the memoir's cosmic turn: from personal healing to a message meant for humanity. The book argues that individual transformation is not separate from collective change — that learning to love ourselves is how we avert the worst of what is coming.</p>
<b>6</b>	<p><b>Shame, Worthiness &amp; the Long Road Home</b></p> <p>Shame is identified as the deepest wound — the belief, installed by abuse and neglect, that we are fundamentally unlovable. Dawn's descent into and eventual emergence from the well of shame is the memoir's spiritual crucible, and its resolution is the book's most quietly radical claim.</p>

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## Discussion Questions

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### ***The Calling***

1. Dawn describes waking one morning to ‘a small white comet’ hovering over her heart, a sensation she eventually names as a calling. Have you ever experienced something that felt like a summons from beyond your own will? How did you respond to it?
2. When Dawn’s body refuses to let her walk back into her office, she interprets it not as a breakdown but as direction. Where is the line between breakdown and breakthrough? How do we know which one we’re in?
3. The memoir frames Dawn’s depression as a necessary passage rather than a problem to be solved. How does that reframing sit with you? Does it change how you think about periods of darkness in your own life?

### ***Trauma, Memory & the Body***

4. The repressed memories of childhood abuse surface slowly, through guided meditation and body sensations rather than clear recollection. What does the book suggest about the relationship between safety and memory? What do you think ‘safe enough to remember’ means?
5. Anne tells Dawn: ‘Your memory didn’t betray you. It protected you.’ How did that line land for you? Is there a distinction you’d draw between protection and suppression?
6. After the psychodrama, Dawn notices she can suddenly touch her toes — a flexibility she’d never had. What does the book say, through this and other moments, about how trauma is stored in the body and what happens when it releases?
7. Dawn’s mother, when finally told about the abuse, at first says ‘I believe you,’ and then backtracks. How did her response affect you? What does it cost a family to finally name the truth?

### ***Love, Projection & the Inner Mirror***

8. The relationship between Dawn and Anne is one of the memoir’s most complex and moving threads. How did you understand it? Did your interpretation shift as the book progressed?
9. Judith explains ‘transference’ — the way we project childhood needs onto present-day figures. Have you ever recognized a transference in your own life? What did it teach you about an unmet need?
10. The Tibetan practice of placing a student with a teacher until ‘the student sees their soul in the teacher’s eyes’ becomes a central frame for Dawn’s relationship with Anne. What did you make of this spiritual framing? Does it resonate, or does it complicate things?
11. At Esalen, Dawn finally understands: ‘I am faith and love.’ She realizes that what she saw in Anne was her own reflection. How does that moment of recognition land? Is it satisfying, or does it feel like something is lost?

### ***The Messages***

12. Over three nights, Dawn receives what she describes as dictated messages from the center of creation. How did you respond to these chapters? Did you read them as spiritual experience, psychological phenomenon, metaphor, or something else?
13. The messages warn against following a prejudiced leader. Written in the early 1990s and received in 2021, they feel urgent in both eras. What does the memoir suggest about prophecy and timing?
14. Dawn writes: ‘We have an opportunity right now to change the trajectory of humanity. And I think we do that by taking personal responsibility for our healing.’ Do you believe individual healing and collective transformation are connected? What would acting on that belief look like?

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15. The apocalyptic vision — millions of souls rising from a darkened earth — haunts the memoir. Dawn says, ‘We still have time.’ What do you make of that hope? Does it feel earned?

### ***Shame, Worthiness & Coming Home***

16. Dawn identifies shame as ‘our greatest obstacle’ — the feeling that at the core of our being we are ugly and undesirable. Where did you feel that wound most acutely in the memoir? Do you recognize it in yourself or others?
17. The image of the well — descending into shame and emerging through it — is one of the memoir’s most powerful metaphors. What does it mean to ‘stay in the well and be aware’? When have you been forced to do something like that?
18. Jen tells her mother: ‘God just opened my love box.’ And Dawn asks: ‘Does it hurt to have your love box opened?’ Jen says: ‘No. It’s the best thing that could ever happen to you.’ Do you agree? Has any experience ‘opened your love box’?

### ***The Frame: Mother & Daughter, Past & Present***

19. The memoir is structured as a mother reading her past to her daughter. How did that frame shape your experience of the story? What does it mean for Dawn to finally share this with Katie?
20. Katie says, ‘I must be love too,’ near the end. How did that moment land? What has she inherited from her mother’s journey?
21. By the end, Dawn is at peace with the past, at peace with Jeff, and wearing an orange shawl that echoes the painting above her fireplace. What has come full circle? What do you think she carries forward?

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## **Book Club Activities**

### ***During Your Meeting***

- Open by going around the circle and completing: ‘The moment in the book that stayed with me most was...’
- Read aloud the passage where Dawn receives the first message (Chapter Twelve). Sit in silence for one minute afterward. What arises?
- Invite anyone who wishes to share: ‘A wound I recognized in myself while reading this book is...’ — without pressure, and with full confidentiality.

### ***Creative Extensions***

- Write a letter to a younger version of yourself from a moment when you needed to be held and weren’t. You don’t have to send it, but you might need to write it.
- Write one sentence that begins: ‘The love I have been looking for in others is actually...’ Bring it to read aloud or keep it for yourself.
- Draw or describe your version of ‘the well’ — the place in you where your heaviest feelings live. What does the bottom look like? What’s the way out?
- Identify one internal message you have been receiving but ignoring. What would it mean to act on it in the next 30 days?

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## A Note for Group Facilitators

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The Messages deals with childhood sexual abuse, depression, spiritual crisis, and the long aftermath of trauma. Create conditions of safety before discussion begins: confidentiality agreements, the right to pass, and a gentle reminder that this is not a space for advice-giving but for witnessing.

The memoir is deeply personal and, in places, spiritually ambitious. Not every reader will share Dawn's metaphysical framework — and that is welcome. The questions above are designed to work across belief systems, inviting reflection on the human experiences the memoir names rather than the spiritual vocabulary it uses.

If your group is open to it, close your gathering by going around the circle and completing: 'One thing I am ready to stop protecting myself from is...'

***“Learn to love now.”***

*— The Messages*