

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Wednesday Letters* comes an inspiring story of a man touched by tragedy—and the quiet stranger who helps him rediscover the joy in life, love and family...

John Bevan's life was complete. Married to his high school sweetheart and father of a young daughter, John finally had the traditional family he lacked as an orphaned child. But all that disappears when a fatal car accident steals away all that he loves most.

His heart filled with sorrow, John withdraws from life and love. He erects two small crosses at the scene of the accident and visits daily, grieving. Then, one morning, he encounters a man kneeling before the crosses, touching them up with white paint.

Conversations with the mysterious stranger—known to him only as the Cross Gardener—begin to heal John's heart. But only when they undertake a journey together does John truly come to see what he must embrace in this world—from the secrets of his own past to the sorrow of his wife's passing—if he is to start his life anew. And only as the journey ends does John divine who his guide may really be.

From Jason F. Wright comes a timeless tale that explores the questions we ask when our lives are touched by loss: How do we carry on? Who will show us the way? The answers John Bevan finds may illuminate your world as they did his—for even in our darkest hour we are not alone.

Praise for *The Cross Gardener*

“Passionate, spiritual and thought-provoking...[A] beautifully written book.”
—Glenn Beck, talk radio and FOX news host, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

"Sharp prose, clever characterizations, thought-provoking insights...fresh and spiritual."
-Don Piper, *New York Times* bestselling author of *90 Minutes in Heaven* and *Heaven is Real*

“Celebrates the incredible joys of the human experience.” —Kevin Milne, author of *The Nine Lessons*.

Discussion Questions

1. John Bevan experiences more hardship in the first few years of his life than many people do in a lifetime. But he does eventually end up in a loving home on an apple orchard. How is this setting significant? What role does this apple orchard come to play in John's life?
2. There are three brothers in the Bevan family, Tim, Scott and John. Tim passes away, while Scott eventually marries. How are their relationships with John different and what roles do they play in John's life?
3. John's adopted father, Wayne Bevan, had a wife who left him because she did not love the orchard as he did. However, John's wife, Emma Jane, agrees to live at the orchard with John. Do you think Emma Jane is giving up her own dreams by doing this? Or is she creating new ones? What about Wayne Bevan's wife? Do you know couples where one member has adopted another's dream? How has this changed their relationship?

4. In Chapter Nine, tragedy strikes John Bevan once again on the side of a rural country road. After it does he erects two crosses and visits daily. Do you think he visits in mourning or in tribute? Or both? Have you seen roadside crosses in your neighborhood? Do you know the stories behind them?
5. In Chapter 16, when John meets the Cross Gardener for the first time, he is at the crosses, touching them up with white paint. John wonders what sins the Cross Gardener is painting away. What do you think John means by this?
6. Discuss John's "Sunday Circuit." Do you think this is his version of church? Is it a valid one, or do you think John is turning his back on his faith?
7. John has two children. His unborn son, Willard, dies before he enters this world. But his daughter Lou Lou lives. How does John interact with her after Emma Jane's death? What does Lou Lou need from John?
8. When Emma Jane's parents, Bob and Michelle, suggest that Lulu stay with them, do you believe they are being supportive of John? Are they being supportive of Lou Lou? Are John's and Lou Lou's needs different and if so, can they be reconciled?
9. Does John struggle with his own faith in this book? It seems as though Emma Jane was well-versed and confident in her faith, but do you think John's beliefs are as strong? Discuss some instances in the novel where John grapples with his faith.
10. In Chapter 22, the Cross Gardener brings John to an untended road memorial which marks the site where two former orchard employees were killed. The Cross Gardener tells John that perhaps not all suffering has a cross, and not all crosses have suffering. What does he mean by this?
11. Why does the Cross Gardener bring John to Travis' funeral (p 176-177)? What do you think he hopes to show John by attending?
12. Why does the Cross Gardener take John back to all the places where his loved ones have died? What does John learn from these visits?
14. Discuss how discovering who the Cross Gardener really is, is the true test of John's faith. How does this tie in to the Cross Gardener's earlier quote, "No one dies alone?"
15. How does John finally find the strength to move on? Were you surprised that he did? Did you think the book might end differently? Did you believe the Cross Gardener's journey with John was "real"?
16. Many people have stories of loved ones who appear to them after they've passed on, much as the Cross Gardener does with John. Have you, or has anyone you've known, had experiences like this? Do you believe this gift is possible?