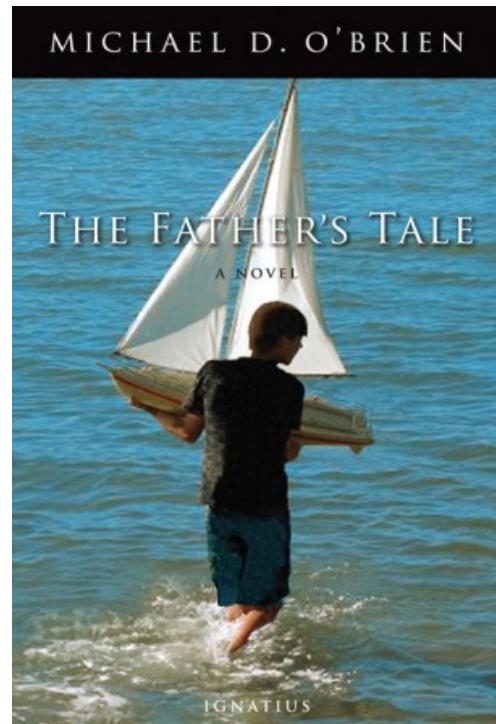


## Discussion Questions for *The Father's Tale*

The central character, Alex Graham, is a good man, a believer, a faithful Catholic. However, he has worked hard to preserve his safe and orderly world, in order to avoid pain or confrontations, or any sense of “the void of despair” which he experienced after the death of his wife. He is a cautious, withdrawn person who prefers to be alone.

1. What are the various factors in Alex’s past and his personality that contribute to his isolation?
2. Is he a person entirely without love in his heart? Or is it a solid but limited love?
3. Any parent would experience radical fear for his child, if the child is severely hurt or is missing without explanation. Discuss Alex’s reaction to the unexplained absence of Andrew.
4. What does this show us about the depths of his heart? Does Alex realize the truths about himself, which the crisis is calling forth?
5. In Oxford, he meets different kinds of people. What does Owen Whittemore show him about being a father?
6. What does Shaw Cunningham show us about the nature of cults?
7. The novel is primarily about the crisis of spiritual fatherhood in our times. Discuss this aspect of the modern age in Western nations. What are the causes of the widespread loss of spiritual fatherhood?
8. What is holy fatherhood? Contrast *authoritarianism* with wise and loving exercise of authority.
9. In St. Petersburg and Moscow, Alex’s world becomes steadily more unsafe, more exposed to the random violence, moral confusion, and degradation of the human condition. Describe three encounters with people that show us he is changing.
10. What precipitates his resolve to follow Andrew’s trail into the east, regardless of the cost?
11. On the journey to Siberia, he encounters two priests and stays with them a while. What does he learn while he is with them?
12. Continuing on the journey, he is angry and discouraged. In that condition he meets two women on the train. What is his reaction to them? Why does he react this way?
13. Recuperating at the doctor’s home in Lake Baikal, he spends months getting to know the family. Discuss his growing relationship with Irina and her two sons.
14. Alex accidentally stumbles upon a secret of the Russian government. He becomes a prisoner and is tortured. In prison he meets “the Muchenik.” Who is the Muchenik? Is he real and present, or is he simply a symbol, a grace given by God?



ISBN: 9780898708158

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15. In China, Alex loses the last of his strengths, his mind, all his resources, and is about to lose his life. At this moment of absolute poverty of being, he realizes something crucial at the core of his being. What is it? What is his final prayer?
16. He is rescued and returns to his home a changed man. In what ways has he been changed during the long journey?
17. In the final scene Alex makes a choice, which is implied more than spelled out. What is it, and what does it tell us about the man he has become?