Bishop's Book Club
October 2026 Offering:
Waugh, Evelyn. *Brideshead Revisited.* New York: Little, Brown, 2012.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK:

Selected by Modern Library as one of the 100 best novels of the 20th century and called "Evelyn Waugh's finest achievement" by the New York Times, Brideshead Revisited is a stunning exploration of desire, duty, and memory.

The wellsprings of desire and the impediments to love come brilliantly into focus in Evelyn Waugh's masterpiece -- a novel that immerses us in the glittering and seductive world of English aristocracy in the waning days of the empire. Through the story of Charles Ryder's entanglement with the Flytes, a great Catholic family, Evelyn Waugh charts the passing of the privileged world he knew in his own youth and vividly recalls the sensuous pleasures denied him by wartime austerities. At once romantic, sensuous, comic, and somber, Brideshead Revisited transcends Waugh's early satiric explorations and reveals him to be an elegiac, lyrical novelist of the utmost feeling and lucidity.

ABOUT EVELYN WAUGH:

Arthur Evelyn St. John Waugh (1903 – 1966) was an English writer of novels, biographies, and travel books; he was also a prolific journalist and book reviewer. His most famous works include the early satires *Decline and Fall* (1928) and *A Handful of Dust* (1934), the novel *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), and the Second World War trilogy *Sword of Honour* (1952–1961). He is recognized as one of the great prose stylists of the English language in the 20th century. Waugh, the son of a publisher, was educated at Lancing College and then at Hertford College, Oxford. He worked briefly as a schoolmaster before he became a full-time writer. As a young man, he acquired many fashionable and aristocratic friends and developed a taste for country house society.

After attending Sherborne School and New College, Oxford, Arthur Waugh began a career in publishing and as a literary critic. He had married Catherine Raban in 1893.

Waugh converted to Catholicism in 1930 after his first marriage failed. His traditionalist stance led him to strongly oppose all attempts to reform the Church, and the changes by the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) greatly disturbed his sensibilities, especially the introduction of the vernacular Mass. That blow to his religious traditionalism, his dislike for the welfare state culture of the postwar world, and the decline of his health all darkened his final years, but he continued to write. He displayed to the world a mask of indifference, but he was capable of great kindness to those whom he considered his friends. After his death in 1966, he acquired a following of new readers through the film and television versions of his works, such as the television serial *Brideshead Revisited* (1981).

QUOTES:

"Sometimes, I feel the past and the future pressing so hard on either side that there's no room for the present at all."
This quote reflects the tension between memory and the present moment, a recurring theme in the novel.

"Oh God, make me good, but not yet."
A humorous yet profound expression of the struggle between desire and morality, highlighting the complexities of human nature—echoing a similar quote from St. Augustine.

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“If it could only be like this always – always summer, always alone, the fruit always ripe and Aloysius in a good temper.”
This quote captures a longing for eternal happiness and the fleeting nature of youth.

“I should like to bury something precious in every place where I've been happy and then, when I'm old and ugly and miserable, I could come back and dig it up and remember.”
A reflection on nostalgia and the desire to preserve moments of joy.

“Perhaps all our loves are merely hints and symbols; vagabond-language scrawled on gate-posts and paving-stones along the weary road that others have tramped before us.”
This quote suggests that love is often elusive and interpreted differently by each individual.

“But I was in search of love in those days, and I went full of curiosity and the faint, unrecognized apprehension that here, at last, I should find that low door in the wall, which others, I knew, had found before me.”
This quote encapsulates the quest of Charles Ryder for meaning and connection.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did you think about *Brideshead Revisited*?

2. Some consider Brideshead Revisited to be a novel about love, some think it is about family, and others the waning powers of British aristocracy. Evelyn Waugh considered it to be a book about religion. Do you think it is only one of these things, or could it be about all of them?

3. In his letter to A. D. Peters, Waugh wrote, “I hoped the last conversation with Cordelia gave a theological clue.” What does Cordelia say that reveals Waugh’s true intentions?

4. When we first meet Sebastian, he carries a teddy bear with him wherever he goes. Why does he carry the teddy? To what degree is Sebastian still a boy when we meet him? How much of this behavior is affected and how much is genuine?

5. Though they were all raised in the same household, each Flyte child has a different relationship with Catholicism. How would you define the differing feelings that Bridey, Julia, Sebastian, and Cordelia have about their religion?

6. Infidelity is treated casually by those in Charles and Julia’s social circle. When the two decide they love each other and want to marry, their relationship becomes much more controversial. Is marriage an act of love in the world of Brideshead Revisited?

7. When Bridey tells Julia she is “living in sin,” it has a great effect on her. Do you think she had never thought of this before? Is it the first time Charles becomes aware of how greatly their “sins” sit on her?

8. There are three significant deaths in Julia’s life — her mother’s, her father’s, and that of her stillborn child with Rex. How do these deaths affect her decisions in life?

9. Would you recommend *Brideshead Revisited*? Why or why not?