

***Left to Tell* Introduction**

Immaculee Ilibagiza is a living example of faith in action. During the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, she and seven other women survived by hiding in a cramped bathroom for 91 days. During their time in hiding, the women heard and saw terrible things. When they finally left the bathroom, they discovered devastating losses. Fortunately, Immaculee's strong faith carried her through this experience. Read *Left to Tell* to discover what it was like to experience the Rwandan Genocide as a young college student. You will be inspired by Immaculee's resilience and the power of her strong faith.

"We all ask ourselves what we would do if faced with the kind of terror and loss that Immaculee Ilibagiza faced during the genocide in her country. Would we allow fear and desperation to fill us with hatred or despair? And should we survive, would our spirit be poisoned, or would we be able to rise from the ashes still encouraged to fulfill our purpose in life, still able to give and receive love? In the tradition of Viktor Frankl and Anne Frank, Immaculee is living proof that human beings can not only withstand evil, but can also find courage in crisis, and faith in the most hopeless of situations. She gives us the strength to find wisdom and grace during our own challenging times."

-Elizabeth Lesser

Background Information

In the early 1990s, Rwanda's population was 85% Hutu and 14% Tutsi. Hutu extremists blamed the Tutsis for social, economic, and political problems within the country. The tension escalated, and on April 6, 1994, a plane carrying Rwanda's president was shot down. A war began, and its aim was to destroy the entire Tutsi population. Over the next few weeks, 800,000 Tutsi men, women, and children were brutally murdered. We will discuss the details of this conflict in class. [Human Rights Watch](#) is a good source for further background information as well.

Reading Questions

Part I

1. Before reading this book, how familiar were you with the 1994 genocide in Rwanda?
2. Describe Immaculee's life prior to the genocide. What did she most enjoy?
3. Describe Immaculee's three brothers.
4. Education is highly valued in Immaculee's family. How do education and faith contribute to Immaculee's growth as a person?
5. How does being Tutsi impact Immaculee's education?

6. Describe the circumstances surrounding Immaculee's father's arrest. How did he handle the experience? Would you have done the same?
7. What is university life like for Immaculee?
8. The political scene in Rwanda is quite tense as Immaculee finishes secondary school and heads to college. What sort of challenges does she face? How would you approach life if you were confronted with challenges like these?
9. Who are the Interahamwe, and what was Immaculee's initial experience with them?
10. Why does she go home for Easter?
11. Immaculee's family home becomes a haven for Tutsi and moderate Hutu neighbors in the wake of the president's death and the mounting violence. What does it mean to offer sanctuary to others? What is the cost to the family? Is it still the right thing to do?
12. Who protects Immaculee? Why?

Part II

1. Where does Immaculee hide? Describe the people with her.
2. Explain how Immaculee struggles with her feelings regarding the killers. How does she cope with this struggle?
3. The mother and baby in the street is one of the most haunting moments in this book for me. Which moments/ experiences stand out to you? Why?
4. What does Immaculee learn about her boyfriend John?
5. Pastor Murinzi tells his children to take a good look at the Tutsi women hiding in the bathroom. He tells them, "If you have a chance to help unfortunates like these ladies in times of trouble, make sure you do it – even if it means putting your own life at risk. This is how God wants us to live." What is the lesson here?
6. What does Jesus say to Immaculee in an apparition?

Part III

1. Whom does Immaculee meet at the camp? What do they talk about?
2. What does Immaculee learn in the letter from Damascene?
3. What is Immaculee's experience with the orphan boys?
4. What does Immaculee believe she must do in order to help heal others?
5. Do you agree with Immaculee that prayer and positive thinking are almost the same thing?
6. How does she both literally and symbolically bury the dead?
7. Immaculee shares "God's message" at the end of the book. What is it?
8. Hope and forgiveness go hand in hand during Immaculee's journey. How does she manage this?