

A BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR TWO NOVELS:

BENEATH A SOUTHERN SKY

&

the sequel

AFTER THE RAINS

by

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BENEATH A SOUTHERN SKY

SYNOPSIS:

After two years as a missionary in a remote river village in Colombia, South America, Daria Camfield has returned to the States alone to mourn her husband, Dr. Nathan Camfield, who is believed to have died tragically while trying to help a neighboring village. Daria finds comfort in the daughter born to her after Nate's death, and later, in the love of her new husband and the child they joyfully await. But their happy lives are shattered when Daria receives a telegram reporting that Nathan has been found alive in captivity in Colombia.

To her horror, Daria finds herself torn between two men, both of whom she loves deeply, both of whom are fathers to her children—and to each of whom she is married. Torn by guilt when she realizes that she had not fully sought God's direction in marrying Cole, she fears that no matter how she chooses now, her decision will destroy the lives of everyone she cares about.

When it looks as though Daria might lose both of the men she loves, one of them makes a sacrifice so enormous that it redeems the sorrow of many lives. The selfless love he shows reflects the incomparable price Christ paid at Calvary and starts a ripple of faith that will bless generations to come.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What were the differences between Nathan's and Daria's callings to the mission field? How do you think each of their callings affected the decisions they made later on? In what ways, if any, is a married woman's calling subject to her husband's desires and situation?
2. What factors did Daria take into account in deciding whether to stay in Timoné or return to the States after Nathan's death? Did you agree or disagree with Daria's decision and her reasons for making the choices she did? Explain your thoughts.
3. How did Daria's parents and parents-in-law influence her relationship with Colson Hunter? How did your own parents influence your decisions about the people you dated and the person you ended up marrying? What would you do (or what have you done) differently concerning your children's choice of dates or mates?
4. At what point did Daria begin to shut out God's 'still, small voice'? List some of the ways that God tried to reach Daria. Have you ever 'tuned out' the Holy Spirit's gentle prompting? What were the results?
5. What role did Cole Hunter play in Daria turning her back on God's leading? What could cause a godly man like Cole to be an 'accomplice' in Daria's quiet rebellion?
6. Once Nate was found alive, which man did you most sympathize with and why? How did you feel about Cole's response to the dilemma? Nate's?
7. What other possible solutions to their dilemma could the characters have explored? If you could re-write the ending of the book, how would you change it?
8. Discuss the problems that Daria might face in the future as a result of what happened. What problems might Natalie and Nicole encounter as they grow up?
9. How did God redeem the tragic events for Daria? For Cole? For Nate? For the other characters?
10. How does the sacrifice Nate made compare to the one Jesus made for us?

AFTER THE RAINS

SYNOPSIS:

Growing up a Camfield in a house full of Hunters, Natalie Camfield's loneliness and her deep desire to belong eventually lead her into a full-blown teenage rebellion. Outwardly, her rebellion ends with the tragic death of her best friend—a death for which Natalie is directly responsible, and for which she pays consequences.

Heading off to college, Natalie is repentant and determined to make up for the sorrow she has caused her family and community, and to assuage the guilt she bears. At the university she runs into Evan Greenway, who was involved in the same tragic accident that killed Sarah, but he has found forgiveness and peace. Evan loves Natalie, in spite of knowing the truth about her. But regardless of her belief that God has forgiven her, Natalie can't seem to forgive herself.

Finally the futility of her search for forgiveness leads her to Colombia, South America where her biological father, Nathan Camfield, serves as a doctor. Though she is heartbroken to leave Evan behind, she feels that perhaps her "real" father holds the key to the peace and forgiveness she seeks.

What she doesn't bargain for is meeting David Chambers there. An American linguist, David, has come to Timoné after his own personal crisis.

Natalie finds fulfillment in helping her father with his medical ministry, but she also begins to realize that her skills are most suited to helping David in his translating work. Consequently, though thoughts of Evan Greenway are never far away, Natalie spends many hours with this fascinating man. David helps Natalie to realize that nothing she could ever do would make her good enough to deserve forgiveness. Though David Chambers is ten years her senior and nothing like the handsome and charming Evan Greenway, Natalie is surprised to find that she has grown to care deeply for him. And although David has seemingly refused to entertain the possibility of a relationship between them, Natalie suspects that he has begun to care for her as well.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Was Natalie justified in believing that her parents favored her sisters? Did you ever think that your parents favored your siblings? If so, were your thoughts justified? If you have children, have you struggled with how to treat them equally and fairly? What conclusions or solutions have you found?
2. Do you feel Cole and Daria were wise in the way they dealt with Natalie's relationships with her birthfather and her paternal grandparents? What might they have done differently to avoid some of the problems that Natalie encountered later?
3. Natalie faced terrible guilt over Sara's death. Do you feel her punishment was severe enough? Could you identify with Sara's mother's ready forgiveness of Natalie? Or would it be more difficult for you to forgive such a sin/crime?
4. Have you ever been faced with a situation where it seemed almost impossible to forgive someone? Have you ever done something you didn't think God could forgive you for? Have you ever had trouble forgiving *yourself* for something?
5. How do you feel about the way Natalie's parents handled her decision to drop out of college after two-and-a-half years? What role should a parent play in the life and decisions of a child who is no longer a minor?
6. Natalie had no use for Evan Greenway in high school. Why do you think her feelings about Evan changed so drastically after they met again in college?
7. Discuss the transformation of Natalie's faith throughout the book—from childhood, to early teens, to college years, to young adulthood. How was her faith journey different from Evan's? What path has your own spiritual journey followed?
8. Evan and Natalie seemed well suited for one another because of their shared faith, their understanding of each other's past, and their obvious feelings of love for one another. Was this enough to make them good candidates for marriage? What other factors should be considered in choosing a marriage partner?

9. David Chambers did not seem like Natalie's 'type' at first, and in fact, their relationship had a rather rocky beginning. Do you think they were ultimately better suited for one another? Why or why not?

10. What purposes do you think the Lord may have had in leading Natalie to Colombia? How did her presence there affect her father? David Chambers? The people of Timoné? How have you seen God intertwine His purposes in your own life with the lives of others with whom you come in contact?