

DISCERNING GOD'S BEST

A Discussion Guide Packet

Desire of My Heart

by Heidi Gray McGill

Meet Heidi Gray McGill

Heidi Gray McGill writes Christian historical romance set on the American frontier, where faith carries her characters through hardship, found family, and second chances. She is the author of the *Discerning God's Best* series. Heidi makes her home in South Carolina, just below the Charlotte, NC, border, with her husband of 35+ years. Together they enjoy walking, hiking, kayaking, scuba diving, snorkeling, and playing with their three grandsons. Connect with her at heidigraymcgill.com.

Dear Reading Friends

Thank you for choosing *Desire of My Heart* for your book club. I am grateful you would spend your evenings and your conversation on Rachel, Charlie, and the found family that grew around them.

Inside this packet you will find discussion questions organized into short sections, a verse to carry with you from the story, and a simple menu idea for your gathering (Rachel's cooking included, for better or worse). Pick a question or two from each section, or work through the whole guide together. There is no wrong way to do it.

If your club would enjoy a visit, I would love to join you by Zoom or in person if I am nearby. Reach out through the contact form at heidigraymcgill.com.

With gratitude,

Heidi

Icebreakers

Before you dive into *Desire of My Heart*, warm up with a few of these.

- Have you ever been welcomed into a family that wasn't your own by blood? What made it feel like family?
- If you had lived on the frontier in the 1870s, what one modern comfort would you miss most?
- Who is the “Grammie” in your own life, the person everyone turns to for wisdom?

Discussion Questions

Choose one or two questions from each section below, or work through the whole guide as time allows. Chapter numbers are noted so you can revisit a scene together.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Desire of My Heart introduces the idea of a “found family” alongside Rachel and Charlie's own household. Which found family connection in the story do you relate to most, and why? (*Chapter 8*)

Which residents of the town showed the most support to their neighbors and to travelers passing through? Who would you want as a neighbor? (*Chapter 16*)

CHARACTER & GROWTH

Charlie is called “the man of the house” three separate times in the story, by Rachel, by Grammie, and by the sheriff. What did each person mean by that title? (*Chapters 15, 17, 18*)

Thomas and his wooden cow Gerta give a young child in the story a genuine voice. How does this choice shape Thomas's development, and what does it reveal about the adults raising him? (*Chapter 6*)

FAITH & SCRIPTURE

Rachel's grief after Melvin's death echoes the Israelites' complaint in the wilderness. How did her accusation strike you as a reader? How did Grammie's own hours in prayer shape the way she responded to that same loss? (*Chapters 15–16*)

Scripture: Exodus 14:11; Isaiah 55:9

What do you think caused Rachel's strong reaction the first time she met Pete Manning? How did the verse Grammie shared with her reinforce the idea that Rachel needed to wait for the man God had for her? (*Chapters 20–21*)

Scripture: Psalm 37:4

THEMES & REFLECTION

Melvin broke with the customs of his time by making Rachel and Charlie his business partners. How different would life have been for his family if he had not done this before his death? (*Chapter 9*)

Rachel's depressive episodes are portrayed with real honesty. How did the people around her offer support on the frontier, and what is one way you can support someone facing a mental health crisis today? (*Chapter 21*)

PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES

Singing Bird's own community judged her as nearly worthless, yet the Trexler family welcomed her without question. Why do you think that family found it so easy to accept her? (*Chapters 35–36*)

Everyone around Martha and Sheriff Adkins seems to see potential in the two of them. If you were in the story, would you have played matchmaker too? (*Chapters 18, 20*)

Rachel is left to raise Charlie and the younger children alone, in a place still new to her, with no clear plan for how they will survive. If you suddenly found yourself in her position, what would your first three steps be? (*Chapters 15–16*)

WRAP-UP & LOOKING BACK

Grammie is a natural spiritual leader within her extended found family. How does she carry that role, and how do the people around her follow her example? (*Chapter 23*)

How do you, and Grammie, know that Marshal Clint Shankel is the right man for Rachel? Looking back, what convinces you Pete Manning was not? (*Chapter 26*)

ONE VERSE TO CARRY WITH YOU

Isaiah 55:9

Open your own Bible and read it together before you begin.

Which Character Are You? A Frontier Personality Quiz

Answer each question, then tally your letters.

1. In a crisis, what's your instinct?

- A. Keep the household calm and cared for.
- B. Act first, ask questions later.
- C. Pray, then speak plain truth.

2. What drives your decisions most?

- A. Protecting the people you love.
- B. Doing what needs doing, no matter the cost.
- C. What God has already shown you.

3. How do you handle grief?

- A. Quietly, and slowly.
- B. By staying busy and useful.
- C. By turning straight to prayer.

4. Your role in a group is usually

- A. The steady one who holds things together.
- B. The one who takes charge when it's hard.
- C. The one others come to for advice.

RESULTS

Mostly A's, you're like **Rachel**. Steady, devoted, and quietly strong even when grief tries to convince you otherwise.

Mostly B's, you're like **Charlie**. Determined and protective, you grow into responsibility long before you feel ready for it.

Mostly C's, you're like **Grammie**. Faith-led and plainspoken, you're the one people lean on.

Word Search

Find each word below, hidden across, down, and diagonally.

F	F	N	Z	U	K	C	P	Z	X	M	O	M	X	C
X	R	F	T	F	C	E	A	R	E	S	O	Z	U	E
T	O	T	H	P	E	M	V	L	A	E	R	R	E	A
A	N	Z	O	X	C	U	I	D	Q	I	X	E	N	G
G	T	A	M	M	E	C	I	S	G	J	R	Q	H	Y
S	I	K	A	A	L	H	I	R	S	N	E	I	B	X
L	E	O	S	R	I	A	V	S	Q	O	N	Q	E	E
R	R	E	Q	S	A	R	Q	A	O	S	U	O	Y	G
F	G	T	A	H	Y	L	Z	E	R	H	F	R	E	E
R	R	P	T	A	X	I	D	R	P	U	B	K	I	R
V	A	Q	Q	L	R	E	P	Z	H	M	Y	D	R	T
B	M	C	H	G	I	B	Y	D	A	A	Q	O	R	A
A	M	Y	H	C	O	K	T	Q	N	R	T	Q	G	W
I	I	O	M	E	L	V	I	N	Q	D	R	Z	P	Q
H	E	W	Q	I	L	W	A	G	O	N	R	G	O	E

**RACHEL • CHARLIE • MELVIN • GRAMMIE • THOMAS • SHUMARD • MISSOURI •
WAGON • PRAIRIE • ORPHAN • MARSHAL • CECELIA • GERTA • FRONTIER**

Answer key on the back of this page when printed.

Q&A with the Author

What inspired this story?

They say to write what you know, so for my debut novel, I pulled from sources close to my heart. I needed a way to process the grief of losing my sight, and Rachel's loss became a mirror for my own, along with the depression that followed and the friends who walked through it with me. My sister Davida, who served as my developmental editor, had lived a version of Rachel's story herself, and I wove in the emotions she carried after losing her husband suddenly, just two and a half years into their marriage, with a five month old daughter at home. Their courtship wasn't like Rachel and Melvin's, but more like Rachel and Clint's. A reader once told me falling in love that fast wasn't realistic, but that part of the story came straight from my sister's own whirlwind romance. She and her husband knew within three days, were engaged in three weeks, and married in three months.

Who is your favorite character?

Grammie, without question. She's based on my mother, who knew how to commune with God and wait expectantly for Him to answer her prayers. Writing Grammie felt like having my mother with me through the entire process.

What's the spiritual heart of this book?

Waiting. *Desire of My Heart* is a story about grief that doesn't move on a schedule, and about learning to trust God's timing even when it feels unbearably slow. Rachel's journey, and the found family that carries her through it, is my way of saying that waiting on the Lord is never wasted.

Rachel's Table

Rachel is the first to admit she is no cook, and her chocolate cake never quite turns out the way she hopes. In her honor, here is a simple menu for your gathering, frontier style. Feel free to bring a cake that actually works.

- Cornbread with honey butter
- Ham and bean soup
- Pickled vegetables
- Sweet tea or coffee
- Rachel's chocolate cake (recipe below, made with love and a little bit of trouble)

RACHEL'S CHOCOLATE CAKE

Ingredients

2 cups sugar • 1¾ cups all-purpose flour • ¾ cup cocoa powder • 1½ tsp baking soda • 1½ tsp baking powder • 1 tsp salt • 2 eggs • 1 cup buttermilk • 1 cup strong black coffee, cooled • ½ cup vegetable oil • 2 tsp vanilla extract

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease two 9 inch round pans.
2. Whisk together sugar, flour, cocoa, baking soda, baking powder, and salt.
3. Add eggs, buttermilk, oil, and vanilla. Beat until smooth.
4. Stir in coffee last. The batter will be thin, that's correct.
5. Pour into pans and bake 30 to 35 minutes, until a toothpick comes out clean.
6. Cool completely before frosting.

A note for your club: Rachel's cake never quite turned out right in the story. Yours will, as long as you don't skip the coffee.

A Closing Note from Heidi

Dear Reader,

Rachel's story is one of grief, patience, and the family we find when we least expect it. I hope her journey reminded you that waiting on God's timing is never wasted time. Thank you for reading, and for sharing this story with your book club.

Heidi