

DISCERNING GOD'S BEST

A Discussion Guide Packet

Vision 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 *Vision of My Heart* for your book club. Of every book in this series, this one asked the most of me personally, and I am grateful you would sit with Sera and Connor's story with the care it deserves.

Inside this packet you will find discussion questions organized into short sections, a verse to carry with you from the story, and an activity or two for your gathering. 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

- Have you ever had to trust God with a future that looked nothing like the one you'd planned?
- Who is someone in your life who, like Buddy, has stayed devoted to you without needing to be asked?
- Have you ever prayed with only one honest word, because it was all you had?

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

Sera counts fence posts, testing how far she can go before her father catches her. What does this opening scene tell you about the line she's walking between safety and independence? (*Chapter 1*)

Connor is introduced calming horses that everyone else finds unsettled, patient and unhurried even in grief he hasn't spoken of yet. What does this first glimpse of him tell you about how he carries what he's lost? (*Chapter 2*)

CHARACTER & GROWTH

Buddy has never left Sera's side since the fever that took her sight, yet he accepts Connor almost immediately. What does the dog seem to understand about Connor before Sera lets herself?

Sally arrives asking for nothing, and Liam holds his ground the same way his late father always did. How does this small, unexpected family reshape the one Connor thought he already had? (*Chapters 20–21*)

FAITH & SCRIPTURE

Sera murmurs “Oh taste and see that the Lord is good” almost without meaning to, a verse rising from memory before she can stop it. What does it tell you that scripture surfaces in her this way, unbidden? (*Chapter 5*)

Scripture: Psalm 34:8

Robin lives her faith the way Pete talks to God, like someone in the room, not a performance for Sunday. How does watching them change the way Connor understands prayer? (*Chapter 6*)

Scripture: James 4:6

THEMES & REFLECTION

Robin tells Connor that by the customs of her people and by Deuteronomy, he could marry his brother's widow out of duty alone. What does the story ask you to consider about the difference between duty and love, and how you'd know which one you were standing in? (*Chapter 21*)

Sera has spent a year testing the edge of a fence her father built to keep her safe. What does the story suggest about the difference between the limits others set for us out of love and the ones we quietly choose to accept for ourselves?

PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES

Connor has an answer for why he prays, but tells Liam he hasn't earned the right to give it yet, since a man shouldn't pass on a faith he's still working out himself. If a child asked you a question about your own faith mid-journey, would you have waited the way Connor does?

(Chapter 26)

Sera built a whole future once, before the fever took it piece by piece, and grieved it alone because no one else thought to name the loss. If you lost the future you'd planned, who would you let grieve it with you?

WRAP-UP & LOOKING BACK

At the wedding, Hans reads Proverbs 19:21, that a man's heart devises many plans, but the Lord's counsel will stand. Sera says she trusted the verse even when she didn't understand it. Where in your own life have you had to trust before you understood? *(Chapter 34)*

By the final page, what do you think the title *Vision of My Heart* means, for Sera, for Connor, and for what each of them finally sees clearly? *(Epilogue)*

ONE VERSE TO CARRY WITH YOU

Proverbs 19:21

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

Which Character Are You? A Frontier Faith Quiz

Answer each question, then tally your letters.

1. **When someone tries to limit what you can do, you**

- A. Test the edge of it quietly, on your own terms.
- B. Stay patient and let your steadiness speak for itself.
- C. Keep the household calm and let time do its work.

2. **Your prayers tend to be**

- A. Honest, even when they're only one word.
- B. Still being worked out, and you're in no hurry to fake the rest.
- C. Woven into everything you do, not saved for Sunday.

3. **People who know you would say you are**

- A. Braver than you feel, most days.
- B. Steady, unhurried, the kind who calms a room.
- C. The one who's already lived through it and come out gracious.

RESULTS

Mostly A's, you're like **Sera**. Determined and quietly brave, you test your own limits before anyone else gets to.

Mostly B's, you're like **Connor**. Patient and unhurried, you'd rather live an answer than perform one.

Mostly C's, you're like **Rachel**. Warm and steady, faith and grace both come easily to you now, earned over a lifetime.

Activity: What's That Sound?

Sera reads the world through sound long before she reads it any other way. Match each sound below to the animal that makes it. A word bank is provided, alphabetical, with a few extras mixed in to keep you honest. Answers are on the last page of this packet.

1. Moo _____

2. Neigh _____

3. Oink _____

4. Baa _____

5. Cluck _____

6. Bray _____

7. Gobble _____

8. Coo _____

9. Howl _____

10. Caw _____

11. Hoot _____

12. Buzz _____

13. Purr _____

14. Hiss _____

15. Croak _____

16. Honk _____

17. Bugle _____

18. Nicker _____

19. Screech _____

20. Warble _____

21. Yip _____

22. Chatter _____

23. Snort _____

24. Cackle _____

25. Yowl _____

26. Trumpet _____

27. Bleat _____

28. Scream _____

29. Yelp _____

30. Bark _____

Word Bank: Bee • Boar • Bobcat • Bull • Calf • Cat • Chicken • Coyote • Cow • Crow • Donkey • Dove • Elephant • Elk • Fox • Frog • Goat • Goose • Horse • Hyena • Mule • Owl • Pig • Rabbit • Sheep • Snake • Squirrel • Turkey • Wolf • Wren

Q&A with the Author

What inspired this story?

This was by far the hardest of the series for me to write, because it was so personal. I am losing my sight to Retinitis Pigmentosa. I was diagnosed in 2001, having already lost 80 percent of my peripheral vision, which left me with 20. I surrendered my driver's license in 2011, and at the writing of this book, I'm down to 10 percent. Each degree of loss hits harder than the last. This book stretched me less as a writer and more as a person of faith. Watching Serafina handle what God has allowed in her life so graciously, trusting Him for her purpose and her future, is something I still struggle with daily.

Who is your favorite character?

Buddy may be a dog, but he is most definitely my favorite character in this book. I have a rule with the animals in this series, horses, mules, a cat, a couple of goats, they all get personalities with a little something human in them, and I find that endlessly fun to write. Buddy is dedicated to Sera and accepts Connor almost immediately, which tells you everything about both of them before either says a word. I only learned after I'd already named him that the very first Seeing Eye guide dog in the United States, trained in the 1920s, was also named Buddy. I had no idea until long after I'd chosen the name myself.

What's the spiritual heart of this book?

Connor's. He grew up Irish Catholic, faithful, knowing the prayers by heart, because his grandmother had instilled them in his heart. But Pete and Robin show him something different: that God is someone you can actually talk to, not just recite words at out of obedience. Early in the book, kneeling alone with more grief than he knows what to do with, all that comes out is "Lord." One word. He thinks maybe that's something to work on. It isn't. When Liam asks him point-blank why he prays, Connor has no answer ready, and he doesn't fake one, a man doesn't pass on a faith he's still working out himself. He waits. By Christmas Eve, he's ready: *"I grew up saying prayers because my grandmother put them in my mouth. Good prayers. True ones. But I was saying them at God, not to Him. Then one day, I meant them. That's the difference between religion and faith, and I'd rather have the second one."* Connor's whole arc is right there: he doesn't have to perform, he doesn't have to explain what he hasn't lived yet, and one honest word is enough to start.

Sera's Table

A Christmas Eve supper, built around the cake that closes out this story.

- Roast chicken or ham
- Mashed potatoes
- Fresh bread
- Sera's Christmas Molasses Spice Cake (recipe below)
- Spiced or mulled cider

SERA'S CHRISTMAS MOLASSES SPICE CAKE

As it would have been made in a Missouri kitchen, December 1877. The warm spice smell of this cake fills the house on Christmas Eve, the night Connor finally has something of his own to hand back.

Ingredients

3 cups white flour • 1 cup dark molasses (sorghum works well) • $\frac{3}{4}$ cup brown sugar • $\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter, softened • 2 eggs, slightly beaten • 1 cup sour milk (1 tbsp vinegar stirred into 1 cup fresh milk, rested 5 minutes) • $1\frac{1}{2}$ tsp baking soda • $1\frac{1}{2}$ tsp cinnamon • $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp ground ginger • $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp ground cloves • $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp nutmeg • pinch of salt

Instructions

1. Cream the butter and brown sugar together until smooth.
2. Beat in the eggs, then the molasses.
3. Dissolve the baking soda in the sour milk and add to the mixture.
4. Sift the flour with the spices and salt, then fold into the wet ingredients until just combined. Do not overmix.
5. Pour into a well-greased 9x9 pan. Bake at 350°F for 30 to 35 minutes, or until a straw inserted in the center comes out clean.
6. Cool before slicing. Dust lightly with powdered sugar if desired.

A note for your club: sorghum molasses gives a slightly milder, earthier flavor than cane molasses and would have been the more common choice in rural Missouri. A wood stove baker would have tested doneness with a broom straw instead of a toothpick.

A Closing Note from Heidi

Dear Reader,

Sera taught me more while I wrote her than any character before her. I hope her story reminds you that trusting God with a future you can't see clearly, in any sense of the word, is never trust wasted. Thank you for reading, and for sharing this story, and this series, with your book club.

Heidi

What's That Sound? Answer Key

30 sounds in all.

1. Moo — Cow | 2. Neigh — Horse | 3. Oink — Pig | 4. Baa — Sheep | 5. Cluck — Chicken
6. Bray — Donkey, not mule. A mule brays too, but its call comes out rougher and more broken, closer to a donkey's bray crossed with a horse's whinny, since a mule is the offspring of both.
7. Gobble — Turkey | 8. Coo — Dove | 9. Howl — Wolf | 10. Caw — Crow
11. Hoot — Owl, the classic great horned owl call.
12. Buzz — Bee | 13. Purr — Cat | 14. Hiss — Snake | 15. Croak — Frog | 16. Honk — Goose
17. Bugle — Elk, the deep, rising call bull elk make during fall mating season.
18. Nicker — Horse, a soft, low sound distinct from a neigh, often used as a greeting.
19. Screech — Owl, specifically a barn owl, which doesn't hoot at all.
20. Warble — Wren | 21. Yip — Coyote, sharper and higher than a wolf's howl.
22. Chatter — Squirrel | 23. Snort — Boar | 24. Cackle — Hyena
25. Yowl — Cat, sharper and more urgent than a purr.
26. Trumpet — Elephant | 27. Bleat — Goat
28. Scream — Bobcat, a sound often mistaken for a human cry in the woods at night.
29. Yelp — Coyote, a second, sharper call distinct from its yip.
30. Bark — Fox, a short, sharp sound closer to a dog's bark than you'd expect.

Decoys never used: Bull, Calf, Mule, Rabbit.