

A Fiction Lover's Devotional

21 Days

of Joy

Stories
that
Celebrate
Mom



Study Guide

Jeanette Morris and Kathy Ide

21 DAYS OF JOY Study Guide
By Jeanette Morris and Kathy Ide

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Preface

Storytelling is a cultural tradition that spans countless centuries and includes every tribe and nation. Long before we had books, or anything in a written language, for that matter, one generation shared its legends and lore to the next through storytelling.

Jesus used both true and fictional stories to share his good-news message of reconciliation with God. Sometimes the stories required soul searching and explanation, which encouraged discussion, transparency, and motivation to change. All of His stories had purpose—and so do the stories in *21 Days of Joy*.

The themes and truths within these stories are about moms of all kinds. But the overall focus is on our perfect parent, God, who never fails or disappoints. Many who would not normally pick up a nonfiction inspirational book (or a Bible) will eagerly read these heartwarming, fictional stories and ponder how the messages apply to their daily lives.

21 Days of Joy can be used with your women's group, Bible study, book club, or get-togethers with friends. In a group format, there is increased opportunity for ministry through sharing, prayer, and "going deeper." That is why we have included tips for leaders in this study guide.

As writers of Christian fiction, we understand that we are in a position to deeply impact countless readers ... for eternity. It is our prayer that you will be one of those readers.

If you'd like to kick off your group study with a personal visit from the editor/compiler, Kathy Ide, e-mail her at Kathy@KathyIde.com to see if your location is near her or fits with her travel schedule.

Tips for Group Leaders

You and your group members could read and discuss one story a day for three weeks, three stories a day for one week, one story a week for about five months, or whatever pace works best for you.

Here are some ideas for how to lead a group study using *21 Days of Joy*.

- Invite group members to your home for refreshments, or plan on getting together at a coffee house or another regular meeting place.
- Have everyone read the assigned story or stories prior to coming, or read aloud when you get together if time allows. If the selection has several characters (more than 2 or 3), consider “dramatizing” the story by assigning readers to play the part of each character as the rest of the group follows along with the reading. One person could be the narrator for the sections that are not in dialogue.
- After reading, discuss different aspects of the story, such as theme, characters, take-away, etc. Use the questions included in this booklet to help you guide the conversation.
- If your group is a Bible study, focus on the questions that direct participants to share Scriptures, compare the fictional story to a biblical story, and/or ponder spiritual applications.
- Do your best to keep everyone in the group involved—not letting one person monopolize or dominate the discussion. Some may be new to the “book club” format.
- Pray for the needs of the members in your group expressed through the conversations you have had together.

Discussion Questions

Story #1
If Only
by Anne Mateer

1. Very often our circumstances are products of our decisions—be they good or not so good—as in the case of Jessica and Belinda. Sometimes our circumstances are caused by situations or people beyond our control, also like Jessica and Belinda. How does Romans 8:28 speak to God’s power in the ways circumstances enter our lives? How does this truth give you hope for your current situation?
2. In John 21:15–22, we read that God gave Peter the desire of his heart: to be reconciled with Jesus. Yet even while Peter was walking and talking with Jesus, he turned to look at his friend and wanted to know how his circumstances to come compared to those his friend would face. How did Jesus tell Peter to deal with this issue of comparison to others?
3. Like Belinda and Jessica, we often envy people without knowing the full story of their lives. Are there things in your life people might envy without understanding the whole story? Can you share this with someone to encourage them?
4. The opposite of covetousness is contentment. Contentment requires trust in God’s goodness toward us and confidence in His faithfulness to meet our needs. Read Matthew 6:24–34. How can you put this kind of trust into practice in your life?
5. Thankfulness helps us focus on God’s provision in our lives and foster the trust that leads to contentment. Philippians 4:6–7 tells us to make our requests known to God *with thankfulness*. What are some tangible ways you can use thankfulness to combat the struggle with envy?
6. Coveting your neighbor’s spouse (Exodus 20:17) doesn’t just mean lusting after that person in a physical sense. It can also mean coveting the relationship, as Belinda does in the story. And while Belinda could make some decisions toward making her own marriage better, she can’t make it so all by herself. What hope does God give us for this kind of a situation? (Hint: see Psalm 37:4; Matthew 6:33; Hebrews 12:1–3).

7. Jeremiah 29:11 is often quoted to remind us that God has plans for our good, but in the preceding verses He tells us how to act on that truth. And in the verses after He reveals the result of His plans. Read Jeremiah 29:4–14. Where were the children of Israel when God promised He had good plans for them? How did He tell them to act in the meantime? What was to be the result in their lives of God’s plans of a future and a hope for them? How does this entire passage help you to live out trusting God’s plans instead of focusing on your desire for something you see in others?



Story #2
Worthy of Praise
by Sherry Kyle

1. Melissa's heart broke when she noticed her daughter's bad mood. Have you ever wished you could take your child's pain away? What happened and how did you cope?
2. Middle-school kids, like Hannah in the story, often internalize their feelings. How does it make you feel when your child gives you the cold shoulder? Did you behave that way when you were a "tween"?
3. Melissa used redirection to help Hannah with her sadness. This is a technique parents often use to focus on positive behavior instead of negative misbehavior. Share about a time when you've used this method with your child.
4. As moms, we often say things to our kids that are better left unsaid. How do you handle that type of situation?
5. Giving our kids space when they are unhappy is necessary but difficult. Why do you think this is important?
6. In this story, Melissa wants to make smoothies, listen to music, and pick flowers to cheer up her daughter Hannah. How have you tried to cheer up your child when he or she is unhappy?
7. Do you tend to focus on things that make you anxious instead of what's true and honorable, right and pure (Philippians 4:8)? Why do you suppose that is?
8. What has God given you that is worthy of praise? Is it something that is seen or unseen (2 Corinthians 4:18)?
9. What does this story teach you about having joy?



Story #3
Here with us
by Nancy Ellen Hird

1. Do you know anything about the adoption process? Have you ever known someone who adopted and then had the birth mother change her mind? How did they cope?
2. The New Testament uses the analogy of adoption to help us understand how God makes us part of His family. Check out Ephesians 1:4–8. Jesus, in a discussion with Nicodemus, also used the analogy of being born into a family. Check out John 3:1–16. Why would God use both of these analogies? Are you a member of God’s family? Would you like to be?
3. The Bible says that children are a gift from God. Why do you think it says that?
4. In the story, Kristie has some understandable doubts about her ability to be a good mom to her adopted infant. If you’re a mom, do you ever have doubts about how well you are parenting? What kind of doubts? What do you do about them?
5. Matt and Kristie’s life will never be the same because of their choice to adopt. Has God taught you anything about Himself, about yourself, or about life through an interaction (or interactions) with a child? What have you learned?
6. How do you think this story will end?



Story #4
Haiti's Song
by Deborah Raney

1. Valerie Austin experienced a deeply embarrassing disappointment. Even so, she trusted that she would someday be able to look back and be grateful it happened. Have you ever experienced a disappointment that turned out to be a gift in disguise?
2. Valerie's fiancé didn't share the same dreams of children and family she had. Can a marriage survive a couple's vastly different goals and dreams? If so, how?
3. Valerie's dream to be a mother of many children was born when she was a young teen. Can you trace your own dreams and life goals to childhood, or were you older when your dreams began to form? How have you realized those dreams and goals?
4. Has God ever said no to a sincere desire of your heart? Where does the Bible say our desires should originate? (See Psalm 37:4.) How did God's apparent "no" turn into a huge "yes" for Valerie?
5. Are there dreams you had for your life that you've had to let go of? If so, did the letting-go cause bitterness or doubt? Have you come to a place of peace with those losses? How was that peace attained?
6. If Valerie's story were continued, what do you think would happen next?



Story #5
Distant as the Horizon
by Kara Swanson

1. Could you relate to the main character, Danae, in this story? In what way? If not, why not?
2. If Danae had made a different choice, how might the ending of the story have changed?
3. At what point in the story were you aware of God's presence or influence on the outcome? How did this change the direction of the story?
4. What Bible story or Scripture passages came to mind as you read the story?
5. Have you ever been burdened with guilt to the point where you felt "stuck" in your spiritual growth? How did you break through—or have you?
6. What fruits of the Spirit are illustrated in this story? In which scene(s) and by which character(s)? What role did Ian the lifeguard play in this story?
7. What does this story teach us about joy?



Story #6
A Long Way from Monroe High
by Julie-Allyson Ieron

1. Courtney's initial opinion of the black-nailed nurse was negative, yet it changed to respect as the meeting about diabetes went on. Why do older and younger generations sometimes find communicating effectively and respecting each other so challenging? How can we attempt to bridge those gaps?
2. What does it mean to honor your aging parent or other relative? (Think of the Ten Commandments as you answer.) How can a younger person show that honor? Does it always mean "obey"? Why or why not?
3. What traits are necessary for a caregiver of an older person or a young child with special medical needs (like Derrick's daughter) to have? How can we take intentional steps to become experts in areas we might not otherwise understand?
4. Is it possible to keep up with family responsibilities while initiating or maintaining solid, supportive relationships? What might Courtney and Derrick find challenging if they begin meeting regularly for coffee (or something more)?
5. Courtney trained long and well for her new position as a chaplain. She had obtained all the head knowledge of what to do in a crisis situation like her mother had. Yet, when it happened to someone close to her, she was stunned. Why is it hard for us to translate knowledge to a situation involving our loved ones? What do we need most in these times?
6. How do the roles of parent and child grow and adapt over the years? What joys and sorrows can result from this change of relationship?
7. What criteria can we use to understand when it's time to put someone else's needs ahead of our own? How can we know where the balance point is? How can we keep from losing ourselves in the process?



Story #7
The Real Mother
by Ann Tatlock

1. In this story, Judy is afraid Katie's meeting her birth mother might somehow change the dynamics between herself and her daughter. But Judy learns that Katie's love for her is much stronger than she imagined. Read Romans 8:38–39. According to these verses, what can separate us from God's love?
2. Katie recalls instances of her adopted mother's love while looking at the photo albums. She remembers how Judy cared for her and provided for her needs. How have you seen God care for and provide for you?
3. Sometimes mothers and fathers give up their children, knowing they're unable to care for them. Other times, they are physically present but emotionally absent. God, by contrast, promises, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). What thoughts and feelings come to mind when you consider God's faithfulness?
4. We sometimes rejoice to think that God has loved us from the moment of our birth. But the Lord has actually loved us far longer than that. Ephesians 1:4–5 tells us that He has known and loved us since before the foundation of the world, and even then He destined us for adoption as His children through Jesus Christ. What does this say to you about God's powerful sovereignty and His steadfast love?
5. Whether your children are biological or adopted, think about those things that hold you together as a family: love, respect, obedience, forgiveness ... something else? How does the parent-child relationship reflect God's blueprint for our relationship with Him?
6. What do you think was the outcome of Katie's visit with her birthmother, Della?



Story #8
Blustery, Beautiful Love
by Cindy Woodsmall

1. Which of the characters in the story did you relate to most, Becca or Ruth? Which one did you like the best/least? Why?
2. Why did Ruth refuse to let Becca go to the party? How would the direction of the story have changed if she had allowed her to go?
3. At what point in the story were you aware of God's presence or influence on the outcome? How did this change the tone of the story?
4. What Bible story or Scripture passages came to mind as you read the story?
5. The Life Application section talks about the difficulties with raising teens. Even if you haven't been the parent of a teenager, how can you use the lessons in this story in your own life or relationships?
6. What fruits of the Spirit are illustrated in this story? In which scene(s) and by which character(s)?
7. What does this story teach us about joy?



Story #9
The Invitation
by Julie Saffrin

1. Elizabeth experienced a double whammy of loss and rejection. Her only son drowned and her husband left her. Both of these events were beyond her control. Have you faced something beyond your control that caused you to live in a way you would never have chosen to do? If so, what did you face? How do you live differently now?
2. This side of heaven, Elizabeth would never be in the physical presence of her son, Tyler. But when she received the wedding invitation, unbeknownst to her, she would receive an invitation from her ex-husband to reconcile. Have you ever received an invitation for a do-over or to make a fresh start? Have you given others a second chance or trusted that their apologies were sincere? Have you received unmerited forgiveness? How so?
3. Elizabeth's story is reminiscent of the story of Joseph and his brothers. In Chapter 37 of Genesis, we read that Joseph experienced a double loss too. First, he suffered the loss of safety and security of his family home. Second, his brothers kidnapped him and sold him into slavery. How did God redeem the years in between, until Joseph was reunited and reconciled with his family? Did the brothers' hearts change? How?
4. For Elizabeth and Daniel, what happened in their two years apart? How did their hearts change? Do you think God was involved in that process?
5. How do you think this story ends? Will Elizabeth be able to forgive Daniel? Will he really wait for her as long it takes? In your life, have you felt or seen God drawing near to you, working on your behalf? Waiting as long as it takes?



Story #10
Jesus and Bunny Slippers
by Lynette Sowell

1. If you are a stepparent, or grew up in a blended family, the feeling and thoughts of Megan and Sharon will no doubt resonate with you. Which of the characters in the story could you relate to most? Why?
2. What if Megan had not called Sharon to pick her up from the party? How would the plot of the story have changed? How would the outcome of the story be different?
3. At what point in the story were you aware of God's influence on Sharon? On Megan? How did this change each of their attitudes?
4. Bible stories and Scriptures reminded Sharon of how to let Megan see Jesus in her. Describe a time when the Holy Spirit did that for you.
5. What Scriptures can you think of that would reinforce the story's Life Application?
6. What fruits of the Spirit are illustrated in this story? In which scene(s) and by which character(s)?



Story #11
Reaching for Redemption
by Lori Freeland

1. Both of the characters in this story had issues that resulted in hurting behaviors—Liz's in the present and Tracy's in the past. Which of the characters in the story did you relate to most? Which one did you like the best/least? Why?
2. If Liz had refused to speak with her estranged mother, how would the outcome of the story have changed?
3. At what point in the story were you aware of God's presence or influence on the outcome? How did this change the direction of the story?
4. What Bible passage came to mind as you read the story?
5. What other Scriptures can you think of that would reinforce the story's Life Application?
6. Have you ever had trust issues with a parent or someone close—someone who was supposed to have your back? How did that affect your behavior or choices?
7. What fruits of the Spirit are illustrated in this story? In which scene(s) and by which character(s)?



Story #12
Take this Job and Love it!
by Martha Bolton

1. This tongue-in-cheek story centers around a mystified “job applicant” and a facetious “clerk.” Which character did you like the best/least? Why?
2. This story didn’t have an overt spiritual emphasis, but it still has a powerful message. What did you think of the author’s approach to the topic of motherhood?
3. Did you expect Melanie to accept the job? Why or why not?
4. What Scripture passages came to mind as you read the story?
5. What fruits of the Spirit are illustrated in the description of the job of Mother?
6. What does this story teach us about joy?



Story #13
Lightning
by Mary DeMuth

1. What did Libby (aka Lightning) learn about love from her parents' relationship that informed her choices in the story?
2. What vow did she make when her father died? How do the vows we make positively or negatively affect us?
3. All of us experience storms, sometimes resulting in devastating consequences. What does Jesus teach us about weathering storms in Matthew 7:24–26? How do those verses help you when storms rattle you?
4. Libby's parents struggled with their finances. Why do you think money issues make conflict even harder?
5. Libby learned the hard way about the devastation of untethered anger and bitterness. How did these traits hurt her relationship with her husband, Sage? Look back over your life. When has anger or bitterness undermined one of your relationships? What did you learn in the aftermath?
6. Just as her marriage was on the verge of destruction, Libby falls to her knees in the dirt and asks God for help. Why do surrender and prayer need to come before life change?
7. James 3:6 reminds us, "The tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself" (NLT). Why is it important to be cautious about the way we speak?



Story #14
My Son, The Swamp Creature
by Pasquale "Pat" Russo

1. When adult children return home to live, conflicts are almost inevitable. Did you empathize mostly with Jessica? Or did you feel more the way her friend Sharon did, that she had very little to complain about? Why?
2. Ironically, Michael, the slobby son, was the catalyst for change in the story. How did his response to his mother's frustration alter the atmosphere in their relationship?
3. At what point in the story were you aware of God's presence or influence on the outcome? How did this change the direction of the story?
4. What Bible passage came to mind as you read the story? Was it a coincidence that Jessica's Bible study group was studying the parable of the prodigal son?
5. What Scriptures can you think of that would reinforce the story's Life Application?
6. Share your responses to the questions raised in the Life Application section. How can you use the lessons in this story in your own life or relationships?
7. What fruits of the Spirit are illustrated in this story? In which scene(s) and by which character(s)?



Story #15
The Gift
by Christina Weeks

1. Sometimes our projects with the Lord take a long time. The mom in the story states she is “trying not to let the weight of unmet hope crush the joy of our small wins.” Have you experienced a similar long-term goal? How did you overcome moments of discouragement?
2. Noah’s mom struggles over whether she’s “enough” for a boy with battle scars like Noah’s. Do you ever struggle with being “enough”? Where do you go for reassurance?
3. In the story, Noah gives his adoptive mom a cherished gift—a hand-drawn card for Mother’s Day—that lets her know she’s meeting his needs. Share a memory of your child giving back more than you’ve poured into the relationship.
4. We are all adopted into God’s kingdom. For some, Noah’s path is similar to their new walk with the Lord—one of overcoming the past and learning to trust. Can you relate? If so, how has the Lord supported you?
5. Hebrews 13:20–21 (NIV) encourages us, “May the God of peace ... equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.” Share a time when the Lord has equipped you for a task greater than you could accomplish on your own.
6. What did this story teach you about joy?



Story #16
Pieces and Quiet
by Barbara Curtis

1. Kate knew she had a wonderful family, yet she felt discontent, focusing on circumstances rather than her blessings. Do you recall a time in your life when you felt like that? How did you refocus on having a thankful heart?
2. Does your home ever seem chaotic? Would you rather it be quiet, or do you enjoy the interaction of all ages, even when it turns noisy?
3. If you don't have small children at home, do you miss the noise and chaos? Or do you prefer the stage of a quieter and mess-free home now? Why?
4. For Kate, taking a walk for just a few minutes alone was her release. What do you like to do when you have a little bit of time to yourself?
5. If your time alone gets interrupted, like Kate's did, what is usually your reaction? How does the person who interrupted you respond to your reaction?
6. Is it hard for you to embrace an interruption to your plans? Why do you think that is? Could the interruption be the beginning of a "divine appointment"?
7. What seeming interruptions in your life could be turned into thankfulness?



Story #17
Where I Belong
by Jan Cline

1. What do you think is the most important qualification for parenting, biology or presence? How did the circumstances of this story illustrate that?
2. Kaylie was willing to donate a kidney to her birth mother, even though she didn't know her at all. Why would a child be so sacrificial for a biological parent with whom she never lived?
3. Kaylie's birth mother, Jenny, changed her mind about accepting Kaylie's kidney at the last minute. Do you think you would struggle with the decision as Jenny did? What would be the outcome?
4. How does the innate desire to know a biological parent relate to the desire to know our heavenly Father? Do you think this desire is inside all people? Can you back that up with Scripture?
5. Do you know where you belong as far as your eternal parentage is concerned? If not, there is no reason to wait until the last minute. God is waiting with open arms to adopt you into His family and give you life with Him eternally.



Story #18
Treasures
by Larry Leach II

1. The main character in this story, Faye, is facing end-of-life decisions about her material possessions. How did reading about this topic make you feel? Why?
2. What if Faye had not prayed about the “cards.” Imagine how the three children would have responded. How would the ending of the story have changed?
3. Faye was obviously a woman of God, a person who relied on the Holy Spirit. Her life was surrounded by Scripture, and she had immersed her children in it throughout their lives. How do you think that influenced the outcome of the meeting?
4. What Bible passage came to mind as you read the story?
5. What Scriptures can you think of that would reinforce the story’s Life Application?
6. Share your responses to the questions raised in the Life Application section. How can you use the lessons in this story in your own relationships?
7. What fruits of the Spirit are illustrated by each of the characters in this story?



Story # 19
A Good Mom
by Roxanne Anderson

1. Christine started her family life with the high ideals often associated with a Christian marriage. But nothing turned out as she planned. Do you think that if someone obeys God's Word and does the right thing, his or her life should go well? Why or why not?
2. Christine's boss put some unreasonable demands on her time—and wasn't at all sympathetic about her situation as a single mom. When you see a single mother, do you assume she is at least partially responsible for her situation?
3. Do you usually think of good mothers as stay-at-home moms, PTA moms, or homeschooling moms? Is there anything else you associate with being a good mother? What kind of mom was Christine? Do you think a working woman can be as good a mother as a stay-at-home mom?
4. Do you have friends who are single mothers? If so, what do you think you could do to be a better friend to them?
5. If your life is no longer "Plan A"—if you have been through brokenness of some kind, like divorce or death or some other loss—what do you think you can expect from God?
6. What Bible passage came to mind as you read this story?
7. What did this story teach you about joy?



Story# 20
God Blesses Me Too
by Jeanne Marie Leach

1. In Bible times, infertility was considered a curse. Do you know or have you ever known someone who was struggling with infertility? Did you think it was a “curse”?
2. Are you able to discuss the situation of infertility with someone who is dealing with it? What did you think of the open way Ardele talked with young Missy?
3. Why do you think people feel the need to offer suggestions to a couple as to why they might be infertile or what they can do about it? Have you ever done that? Will you think differently about doing so after reading this story?
4. When a couple is childless, do you pity them? What if being childless is their choice? Do you feel it’s wrong not to have children?
5. Have you ever asked an infertile couple how you could pray for them? Or did you assume they were going through life sad and unfulfilled?
6. Did it surprise you to discover that God blessed Ardele with “grandchildren” in her old age? Have you had a similar experience in bonding with children who are not yours by blood?
7. In the story, God gave Ardele, an infertile woman, a mother’s heart so that behind the scenes He could use that heart to bless hundreds of children. Could it be that her blessing was even greater than the blessing of having children by birth or adoption? Why or why not?



Story #21
But I Still Love You
by Julie DeEtte Williams

1. In the story, Debbie's mom may have forgotten her daughter's name, but her love for her remained. List the people in your life who will be the keepers of your memories as you age.
2. We all have memories we'd like to forget. Psalm 56:8 says, "You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book?" What does this say about what our past hurts mean to God? How might some painful memories be beneficial to us and those we share them with?
3. God instituted the Passover in the Old Testament and communion in the New Testament as times of remembrance. What are some traditions we can begin today that commemorate our experiences with those we love?
4. Debbie was challenged in her role as her aging mother's caregiver. Have you had the privilege of caring for your aging parent? How did you cope with the role reversal?
5. Were you surprised to learn that Debbie worked at an assisted-living facility? Knowing that, what counsel would you give to Debbie regarding her frustrations and challenges with caring for her mother?
6. What did this story teach you about joy?



Wrap-up

Have you enjoyed this group study of *21 Days of Joy: Stories that Celebrate Mom*? What did you like most? What could have been done differently to make it better? (Share your ideas with the group or the leader.)

Which story was your favorite? Why?

The next time you read a novel or a short fiction story, will you read it differently? Will you be more likely to look for ways the characters and situations apply to your life and circumstances?

How can you encourage others by sharing the blessings you received from this study and/or the devotional? Would you consider going to [facebook.com/FictionDevo](https://www.facebook.com/FictionDevo) and sharing your thoughts there?

Would you like to do a group or individual study for other books in this series? Which one do you think you would enjoy most: *21 Days of Grace: Stories that Celebrate God's Unconditional Love*, *21 Days of Christmas: Stories that Celebrate God's Greatest Gift*, or *21 Days of Love: Stories that Celebrate Treasured Relationships*?

