

A Fiction Lover's Devotional

21 Days
of
Love

Stories that
Celebrate
Treasured
Relationships



Study Guide

Jeanette Morris and Kathy Ide

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

Copyright © 2016 by Kathy Ide

Available in PDF from www.FictionDevo.com.
Available in e-book from Amazon and Barnes and Noble.

For more information on this book, the devotional, and the series, see www.FictionDevo.com.

All rights reserved. Non-commercial interests may reproduce portions of this book without the express written permission of the authors. When reproducing text from this book, include the following credit line:
“21 DAYS OF LOVE Study Guide by Jeanette Morris and Kathy Ide. Used by permission.”

Commercial interests: No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means—electronic, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior permission of the authors, except as provided by the United States of America copyright law.

Scripture quotation marked NASB taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotation marked NIRV taken from NEW INTERNATIONAL READER’S VERSION®. Copyright © 1906, 1998 Biblica. All rights reserved throughout the world. Used by permission of Biblica.

Printed in the United States of America.

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 Love*.

The themes and truths within these stories are about all kinds of love. But the overall focus is on the perfect love of God, which 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 Love 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 Love*.

Invite group members to your home for refreshments, or plan to get together at a coffee house or other 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 more than two or three characters, consider “dramatizing” the story by assigning readers to play the part of each character while 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. As the leader, you can select the questions that work the best for your group. Don’t feel you have to cover everything.

If your group is a Bible study, we suggest you 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—don’t let one person monopolize or dominate the discussion.

Open and/or close each meeting with prayer. Pray for the needs of the members in your group expressed through the conversations about the stories that you have together.

Discussion Questions

Story #1 Ballerina Girl by Lori Freeland

1. Unfortunately, the dreams of youth are all too often thwarted or destroyed by circumstances beyond our control. Savannah had big dreams, but the accident changed her life's direction. Can you relate to Savannah? How so?
2. The Bible tells us that God works all things together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). How did this accident bring God's "good" into Savannah's life?
3. Is your personality more like Savannah's or Logan's? Explain.
4. What Bible story has a similar theme to this one?
5. What do you think happens to Savannah and Logan?
6. What does this story teach us about treasured relationships?



Story #2
A Valentine for Teacher
by Renae Brumbaugh

1. An important aspect of a good short story is the author's ability to stimulate your senses to give you a sense of the setting. Which descriptions in the story's opening did that for you?
2. Have you ever faced a conflict like Kate's—a career or life choice with so many restrictions that you had no time or ability for a romantic relationship? How did you cope?
3. Have you ever made hand-crafted Valentines? Share why you chose this method over purchasing something from a store.
4. Kate had no idea that the visiting cousin would be a handsome, eligible bachelor. Keeping in mind the mores of the 1800s, how well did she handle the awkward situation? How might she have behaved if cousin Will had been the “leader of a three-ring circus” that she imagined instead of a wealthy oil man?
5. At what point does Kate's faith in God enter the story?
6. Besides Psalm 37:4, which is mentioned in the Life Application, what Scriptures can you share that relate to the theme of keeping God at the center of our lives?



Story #3
Secondhand Life
by Cindy Woodsmall

1. The circumstances of Jemma and Arlan's marriage stir up both curiosity and pity. But even outside the Amish community, couples are sometimes forced into marriage when there is no love between them. Discuss these situations and how the Amish rules are similar and different from your own culture.
2. Jemma felt threatened by the younger, smiling Fannie Ruth. It's not always another person that threatens to destroy relationships. What else can come between a couple?
3. When Jemma rushed outside to intervene, what did you think would happen?
4. When the story switches to Arlan's point of view, how did that perspective change your opinion of Arlan?
5. Why do you think Jemma hesitated to tell Arlan the truth about her reasons for withdrawing from him?
6. Was Arlan convincing about the time he spent talking to Fannie Ruth? Was he convincing about his true feelings for Jemma?
7. Although this confrontation was uncomfortable for both Jemma and Arlan, how did it change the dynamic of their relationship?



Story #4
More than Dates and Flowers
by Jeanette Hanscome

1. When has Valentine's Day or another "romantic" occasion caused you to feel like Kim? How did you handle it?
2. God created us for relationship—with Him and with others. Why then do our relationships cause us so much pain?
3. Proverbs 11:25 shifted Kim's focus from her own pain to how she might soothe Teresa's. What other evidence can you find in Scripture that tells us we benefit from blessing others?
4. When has God used a kind person to refresh you when you were hurting?
5. When have you benefited from showing kindness to someone else?
6. What biblical story comes to mind that illustrates the principle of being kind to others?
7. What does this story teach us about treasuring our relationships?



Story #5
Outspoken Love
by Janet Sketchley

1. Which character(s) in the story did you related to most? The least? Why?
2. Olivia's strong will kept her walking despite the pain of her arthritis. That same determination kept her from trusting God. What might you say to someone like this to invite him or her to consider faith?
3. Do you have a person like Olivia in your life? Does knowing that he/she loves you help you give love back instead of bristling at his/her behavior?
4. What do you think Olivia would be like if she'd turned to faith instead of relying on herself?
5. How did Trina's visit to her grandmother influence her faith?
6. Music sometimes reaches the core of mentally challenged people. What songs or hymns might you consider reinforcing now in your memory for the days ahead? How about some Bible verses you could memorize?
7. Have you experienced a friend's or family member's slide into dementia or Alzheimer's? How were you able to show your love? How did others support you? Did you see God at work sustaining you?
8. Love is a choice, and at times an act of the will. Has there been a time in your life when you came to love and appreciate a difficult person? How did you reach that place?



Story #6
Silk Roses
by Kathy Ide

1. Have you heard the advice: “Don’t marry someone you can live with. Marry the man you can’t live without” or something similar? What did you think of that when you heard it? What do you think of it after reading “Silk Roses”?
2. Like Jamie, have you ever felt as if you really knew someone’s heart, only to find out that you were wrong? How did that make you feel about yourself and the other person?
3. Have you ever felt romantic love so strongly that it overpowered everything else, including your logic and reason? If others tried to warn you, how did you respond?
4. Can you think of a time when you were confused, upset, or hurt and someone you barely knew did something kind and thoughtful? How did you respond?
5. Has there ever been a time when someone you barely knew seemed confused, upset, or hurt and you did something kind and thoughtful for him or her? How did that person respond?
6. Have you ever been tempted to get back into a relationship you knew was bad for you? What caused the temptation? Did you resist like Jamie, or did you give in? If you eventually got out and stayed out, what gave you the willpower to do so?
7. Think of a time when you experienced God’s steady, unchanging, unfailing love. When has His perfect love helped you heal from an imperfect relationship?



Story #7
My Hero
by Marci Seither

1. In the story, Kate felt her marriage to Dan was lacking the romance it once held, mostly because of their overly busy lives. What things are you busy with that require your energy and attention?
2. If you are married, do you ever feel like the romance in your marriage has faded? What can you do to re-energize romance?
3. Do you think Dan really changed the way he felt about Kate? Or had Kate changed?
4. There is a big difference between tending to the urgent and being mindful of what is important. In the story, Dan and Kate had a hard time finding that balance. How do you strive for and maintain balance in your relationships?
5. Consider a small body of water that doesn't have anything fresh flowing into it. Even a small stream will help to keep it from becoming stagnant. How did the faded geranium remind Kate of her relationship with Dan? How can you water your relationships to help them grow and thrive?
6. What does this story teach you about treasured relationships?



Story #8
God Spelled Backwards
by Rachel Barrett

1. Think of a time when you felt abandoned and alone. Were you able to reach out for help, or did you withdraw like Blair? In what ways did God bring healing to your situation?
2. Proverbs 12:10 says, “A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal” (NASB). Think of a time when you worked hard to care for something or someone who depended on you—a pet, a child, a spouse—and everything seemed to fall apart. What lessons can you learn from that experience?
3. What Scripture verse or passage has helped you to understand and accept God’s unconditional love and mercy?
4. What Bible story could be compared to “God Spelled Backwards”? What are some similarities and differences?
5. If Gracie had not found her way home, how would the story’s outcome have changed?
6. Think of a time when something or someone you loved was taken from you. In what ways did you come to better understand how “every perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17 NASB), and that while God ministers to us through circumstances or people around us, He alone is the source?
7. It is important to dedicate ourselves to areas of stewardship—be it pastoring a church, running a business, or giving a home to a stray dog. On the other hand, we can’t “go it alone,” as Blair tried to do. What are some ways to make sure that you balance fulfillment of calling and ministry with seeking inner refreshment and support?
8. Are there ways you could personally minister to someone who might be lonely or hurting?



Story #9
Desert Crossing
By Dona Watson

1. Could you relate to Lori and her grief and guilt over the behavior of her son, Joshua? Do you think she did the right thing by leaving him in jail overnight?
2. Often our hopes and dreams for our children do not work out, and our kids take paths that are different from what we want for them. Lori was at the end of her patience and her faith—especially because she was fighting the battle alone. Have you ever been a single parent with a rebellious child? How did you cope?
3. Lori's serviceman husband returns home to surprise her just in time. Did you see the hand of God in this event, or just a lucky coincidence?
4. What did you think of the way Lori and David responded to Josh when he admitted his need for help?
5. What biblical story comes to mind that is similar to this one?
6. What does this story teach you about treasured relationships?



Story #10
For the Love of Peter
by Marsha Hubler

1. When you read about Hannah going behind her parents' backs and disobeying them, did your mind drift to a time in your youth when you disobeyed? What was the outcome?
2. Hannah's disobedience centered around her love and concern for a boy. Could you relate to those feelings when the love bug struck you for the first time? What became of that relationship?
3. At what point in the story were you aware of God's influence on the outcome?
4. Were you surprised to learn that the Old Order Amish religion is that of works and not salvation by God's grace alone?
5. What sealed Hannah's decision to open her heart and receive Christ as her Savior?
6. What do you think Hannah meant when she said, "A tremendous burden has been lifted from my soul"?
7. Has anyone ever turned his or her back on you because of your Christian beliefs? How did you respond? Was the relationship ever restored?
8. What Scripture verses do you know that clarify God's gift of salvation to all who accept Christ as their Savior?



Story #11
Multiplying Love
by Kelly Wilson Mize

1. Lily's favorite place was school because it was the only place she felt safe, secure, and loved. Where is your favorite place? Why?
2. Are there painful experiences in your life, soon forgotten by others, that are difficult for you to get over, even though you know you should? Why are you hanging on to those memories?
3. What gifts have you given or received that have had special significance to you? Why do you remember them?
4. Lily's teacher planted seeds of Christ's love in Lily's heart. What seeds were planted in your heart at an early age that you only later recognized?
5. How do you think Lily's home life was affected by the valentines she gave her mother and brother at the end of the story?
6. Share your thoughts on the idea that love multiplies.
7. First John 4:19 was instrumental in opening Lily's eyes to the love of God. If you had to choose one Bible verse or passage to sum up the love of God, what would it be? Explain.



Story #12
A Time to Remember
by Terrie Todd

1. Do you know people who are 24/7 caregivers? What can you do to help lighten their load and encourage them?
2. When you experience disappointment with God, where do you go with it? Can you be honest with God about how you feel?
3. There is no mention in the story of an outside support group for Judy. How might such a group be of benefit?
4. When Judy comes home from work, Bob is singing “How Firm a Foundation.” Look up the lyrics to this old hymn. Which verse speaks most powerfully to you?
5. What is the best ending you can imagine for this story? The worst?
6. Judy believes God brought her and Bob together even though He knew this tragedy was going to happen. What do you think might be God’s purpose for Judy? For Bob? For Bob’s children?
7. What fruits of the Spirit are illustrated in this story? In which scene(s) and by which character(s)?
8. What does this story teach you about treasured relationships?



Story #13
On the Mountaintop
by Nanette Thorsen-Snipes

1. When tragedy strikes, even the most idealistic of persons has to face reality. That is certainly true of the main character in this story, Gabby, who seemed to live for romance and all it symbolized. Can you identify with Gabby? In what way(s)?
2. Gabby's daughter, Bethany, was only concerned about the present. Were you sympathetic with this outspoken teenager's need to celebrate and feel special? Was she being a "me-monster" for the occasion, considering her mom's circumstances? Why or why not?
3. God answered Gabby's prayer in a touching, unique way. Has God ever shown you a way to give when it seemed you had nothing to give? How did the recipient respond? How did you feel?
4. Legacy gifts usually go beyond the "now" because they represent family—past and future. Do you think Bethany will pass the diamond ring to her future daughter or daughter-in-law? Will she share the story of her sixteenth birthday when she does? Why or why not?
5. What does this story teach you about treasured relationships?



Story #14
Call It
by Rachael Landis

1. Have you ever had a close relationship with someone of the opposite sex that was truly “just friends”? How did that work for you?
2. Can you relate to Lucy wanting to define her relationship with Dereck? Share a time when a friendship became love or an acquaintance became a close friend and how you felt.
3. If you were Lucy, what would you have done about your feelings? If you were Dereck, how would you have responded to Lucy’s desire to define their relationship?
4. What do you think would have happened to Lucy if Dereck had felt differently about her? Share some ideas on healing after heartbreak or disappointment.
5. How do you think Hollywood’s ideas and our modern culture have affected our perception of love? What does God say about love? Share some Bible verses.
6. Read 1 Corinthians 13 and ponder the true meaning of love. How has God shown His love to you? How has someone special in your life shown you love?
7. Why do you think it is sometimes difficult to receive God’s love? How can you learn to accept His love in your life?



Story #15
Love Deeply
by Sherry Kyle

1. Which of the characters in the story did you relate to most? Which character did you like the best/the least? Why?
2. Heather and Matthew's marriage was in trouble, and their faith was on the rocks as well. How do these two often go hand in hand?
3. Heather's friend and mother-in-law conspired to create an amazing Valentine's Day for her. How important are friends and family during difficult times? Can you think of a situation where they might be a hindrance to a marriage?
4. Forgiveness is a key part of the Life Application in this story. How can you use this lesson in your own relationships?
5. Besides 1 Peter 4:8, can you think of any Scriptures that show us how to love deeply?
6. If you lived by the words in Ephesians 4:2–3, how do you think that would affect your relationships?
7. Describe what it means to have God as the third strand (Ecclesiastes 4:12) in your marriage. If your spouse isn't a believer, how do you include God in your marriage?
8. What does this story teach you about treasuring your relationships?



Story #16
A Finger and a Big Toe
by Nancy Ellen Hird

1. What kind of friendship did Becky and Carla have? What do you look for in a close friend?
2. Do you think God cares about whether we have friends? What examples of friendship are found in the Bible?
3. We all have different kinds of relationships with various people. Think of some people you know with whom you have a less-than-close friendship. How can you show love and respect to them?
4. Becky carried a tremendous burden over her so-called failed relationship with Jennifer. Have you ever wanted to be closer to someone who didn't want the same degree of closeness with you? What did you tell yourself about that situation? What do you think God would say to you about it?
5. Should you become best friends with someone just because that person is lonely ... or because you are lonely? Why is it important to pray about choosing our friends?
6. Our lives are always changing. Friendships can also change. When and how do you think friendships change? In what ways do they stay the same? What about our relationship with God? Does it change?
7. The Life Application talks about levels of friendships. On which level would you put your relationship with God? Where do you think He would like to be?



Story # 17
The Candy Bowl
by Christine Henderson

1. What family “treasures” do you have that give you a personal connection to a family member?
2. If that person is deceased or not nearby, how does having that treasure make you feel?
3. In the story, Maggie was in a new city, away from family and friends by choice. But she felt lonely. Have you ever been in a similar place of isolation? How did you cope?
4. Do you know anyone who is new at your church, workplace, or in your neighborhood? How can you make them feel welcome?
5. What Scripture quotes come to mind about dealing with strangers, feeling alone, or encouraging others? How do they relate to the theme of this story?
6. Does using social media make you feel more connected with people or less? Why?
7. Hebrews 10:25 (NIRV) says, “Let us not give up meeting together. Some are in the habit of doing this. Instead, let us encourage one another with words of hope. Let us do this even more as you see Christ’s return approaching.” Is social media an example of “meeting together”? Or do we still need a gathering together in person? Explain your answer.



Story #18
Full Pursuit
by Julie DeEtte Williams

1. “Full Pursuit” was written as an analogy of how Christ pursues His bride, the church. What correlations do you see between this story and your experiences when you first came to learn about God?
2. Some people view God as a cosmic police officer, watching them all the time, waiting for them to make a mistake so He can punish them. Have you ever had this view of God? What are some other ways people might see God (e.g., as a genie, a parent, a friend, a stranger)? How do you currently view God?
3. How does it feel to know that God does not ask our permission to pursue us? How did He first declare His intentions toward you? How did you respond?
4. Are your current friendships leading you into a closer relationship to Christ? If not, are you willing to ask God for friendships that will lead you closer to Him?
5. Joshua left the roses on Beth’s doorstep before he pulled her over. Can you see evidence of God’s loving-kindness to you from before you met Him?
6. Joshua offered to repair Beth’s taillight, the very thing he’d ticketed her for. How is that like Christ’s loving-kindness toward us?
7. At the end of the story, Beth accepts Josh’s offer and is looking forward to getting to know him. What are your favorite ways to draw closer to people? To God?



Story #19
An American Valentine's Day
by Roxanne Anderson

1. The story of Arjun and Nisha's first Valentine's Day in America is both amusing and thought-provoking. What positives did you find in their experience? Negatives?
2. Is Valentine's Day just for expressing romantic love? If not, what other kinds of love can or should be expressed, and to whom?
3. Are you comfortable interacting with people from other countries and making friends with them? Why or why not?
4. Holidays are celebrated in all cultures. Jennifer took advantage of the opportunity of Valentine's Day to share the love of God with Nisha. Did reading this story make you think any differently about how foreigners perceive our holidays, or how we perceive theirs?
5. Do you know how to share your faith with someone? Is that something that is important to you? Did this story shed light on how the gospel can be shared naturally in the course of everyday conversations and circumstances?
6. Compare and contrast the two very different explanations of Valentine's Day in this story. Next time someone asks you to explain the holiday, how will you respond?



Story # 20
Rose in Bloom
by Jennifer Sienes

1. Why do you think Kennedy shrugged off her friend Cody's encouragement to find a man?
2. Was the awkwardly forward customer inappropriate—or was Kennedy? Explain your response.
3. Did you expect the woman with the streak of pink in her hair to be elderly? Why or why not?
4. Do you believe in love at first sight? Why or why not?
5. If the story continued, what do you think happens next?
6. What does this story teach you about treasured relationships?



Story #21
Bringing Him Home
by Susan May Warren

1. The main character, John, harbored a great deal of resentment toward his deceased father—mostly for his father’s decision to keep his illness and his needs private. Have you ever felt resentment, or even rejection, due to a friend or family member not sharing important news with you?
2. Some people, like John’s dad, show their love through acts of service. How did the restoration of the canoe become a metaphor for John’s relationship with his father?
3. Respond to these lines from the story: “He’d gotten what he asked for. But not what he truly wanted.” What Bible story does this bring to mind?
4. When Ingrid appeared on the dock, John’s hope for love and a life of meaning were suddenly restored. Yet the author gives us one more surprise in the final words that reveal the greatest longing of John’s heart—his father’s approval. Were you expecting this ending? Why or why not?
5. What does this story teach you about treasured relationships?
6. What can you learn about our heavenly Father’s love for us through John’s journey back to home?



Wrap-up

Have you enjoyed this study of *21 Days of Love: Stories that Celebrate Treasured Relationships*? What did you like most? What could have been done differently to make it better? (Share your thoughts on the FictionDevo.com forum or the Fiction Devo Facebook page. If you're in a group study, share your ideas with 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 than you have before? Will you be more likely to look for ways the characters and situations apply to your life and circumstances?

How can encourage others by sharing the blessings you received from this study guide and/or the devotional? Would you consider visiting FictionDevo.com and posting something on the forum for *21 Days of Love*? Or going to facebook.com/FictionDevo and sharing your thoughts there?

Would you like to do an individual or group study for other books in this series?

21 Days of Grace: Stories that Celebrate God's Unconditional Love
21 Days of Christmas: Stories that Celebrate God's Greatest Gift
21 Days of Joy: Stories that Celebrate Mom

Which one do you think you would enjoy most?