

Tender Grace Discussion Questions

1. Audrey has dropped out of life because her husband has died. She is overwhelmed with the desire to have her old life back, identifying with Tennyson's line, "The tender grace of a day that is dead will never come back to me." Besides losing a loved one, what other circumstances might make us wish to have our old life back?

2. Audrey's anesthetizer of choice is hours of television watching. She panics if her allotted time for recording reaches fifty hours. How else do people choose to disengage from life rather than deal with their problems?

3. On page 35, Audrey briefly ponders the verse she read earlier: "From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another." It's important to see that God blesses us in so many ways, even in hard times, but Audrey says, "When you're emotionally dead, you don't see. You don't want. You don't need. You don't care. I wish I could see and embrace and rejoice in the blessing instead of hating this post-Tom existence." Can you recall ways God has blessed you, specifically as well as generally, when you were going through a difficult time?

4. Audrey says she has "an irrational fear of cab drivers." One of her real fears, of course, is going on without Tom. Do you have an irrational fear and is there a story behind it? What is one of your real fears?

5. Audrey admits that it isn't easy to "transcend the physical" and care about spiritual things, which are more important and lasting. Give examples of how the spiritual is often eclipsed by the physical. Or give examples of how, in the reality of our everyday lives, the physical seems to be more important than the spiritual.

6. Audrey has a group of four verses that are her "sheep to count" when she can not sleep. What are some of your favorite Bible verses? What is your favorite prayer?

7. When Audrey encounters the girl in the hallway of her hotel in Amarillo, she wishes she had done more to show her God's love. She takes advantage of opportunities for that later in her journey. Can you recall a situation when you reached out to an individual who needed to know God is near? How were you able to do that? Can you recall a time when you let that opportunity get away from you?

8. Audrey says that for Tom "seventy times seven" wasn't an incredulous number; "it was love's concession." She thought she was very good at forgiving,

but when Andrew contacts her, she is forced to question that. Many people find forgiveness not to be hard until they have to do it! Have you ever found it hard to forgive someone? Why? And if you have managed to forgive something difficult, how did you do it?

9. When Audrey is at Willa's, she says, "I don't know why I hesitated to come to Phoenix. Willa is fun and considerate, and the best friend anyone could have." What qualities do you seek in a friend?

10. As Audrey sits talking to Andrew, she thinks, "I've been into reality for a very long time now. I've seen fantasy destroy perfectly satisfactory realities." What do you think about this? Is she right? Have you known anyone who has fallen victim to the "grass is greener" mentality?

11. Were you surprised by Audrey's choice to be only loving friends with Andrew? How did you feel about her encouraging him to reunite with his wife? Was this a good choice? What did she lose? What did she gain?

12. In gratitude for what God has done for Liz and Vernon, Audrey builds an altar of palm branches and watches the sun set. If you were sitting on the beach with an altar of palm braches, for what would you give thanks?

13. Audrey believes reading the book of John is as responsible for her recovery as making the trip. Do you believe reading God's word would really make such a difference in a life? Do you have a specific example of a time it changed someone's life?

14. Audrey leaves Zack in San Francisco, and when he e-mails her and asks if she'd like to spend time together when he's in Missouri, she writes: "I'm pretty sure I do. Call me." Do you think Audrey and Zack will continue to be friends? Do you think they'll get together some day? Do you wish the outcome of their relationship had been revealed in the book?

15. Can you think of something in the last week or month that could have made you exclaim, like John and Audrey, "It's the Lord!"? What are some of the "tender graces" in your life?