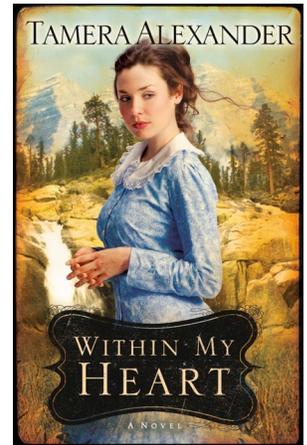


WITHIN MY HEART
Reading Group Guide
A TIMBER RIDGE REFLECTIONS novel
By Tamera Alexander



Warning! The discussion questions contain “spoilers.” So if you haven’t read or finished reading the book yet, these will ruin a few plot surprises. Also, you don’t have to use every question in your group discussion. Pick and choose, or add some of your own.

A note from Tamera:

Dear friends,

I’m honored you’ve chosen *Within My Heart* as your reading group selection, and I hope you enjoyed Rand and Rachel’s story. Christ drew me closer to Him as I wrote this story, and my prayer is that somewhere along the way as you read, you took a step closer to Him too.

I’d love to join your group discussion! If you’re interested, email me at tameraalexander@ymail.com and inquire about Virtual Book Club Meetings. I’ll also send you a Book Club Packet with goodies to distribute to your group.

Thanks again and continued blessings,
Tamera

1. The prologue opens in the City Cemetery in Nashville, TN, in 1864. When you reached the end of the prologue, what was your reaction? Since you knew (from reading the back cover blurb) that Rand Brookston was the main male character in this story, did it surprise you to learn that this had happened to him?
2. Rachel and Rand already know one another when the story opens. And while he’s fond of her, she’s not too keen about him, to put it lightly. Why is that? Have you ever judged someone prematurely (and mistakenly) based upon their profession, or where they lived, or where they were from?
3. Rachel slowly begins to see Rand for the man he is, instead of the man she thought him to be. Do you remember when this first started? What specific things did she witness that made her change her mind about him?
4. Rachel struggles with disciplining Kurt, her youngest son, and feels a weight of guilt over not being a “better mother.” Have you ever struggled with disciplining your child?

Have you ever unintentionally said something to your child (or another person) that has actually made things worse, even though you weren't aware of it at the time? (Like Rachel was doing with Kurt when she spoke about Thomas as though Kurt should remember tiny details about him. But Kurt didn't, and therefore the boy felt guilty, which led him to misbehave.)

5. Rachel had an issue with forgiveness, especially when it came to Daniel Ranslett. What's the history between her and Daniel? Seeing the situation from her perspective, can you understand or at least identify with her anger and resentment toward him? Taking responsibility for our own actions can be so difficult, while blaming others seems to come more naturally. Why do you think this is?

6. At the end of Ch. 20, Rachel extinguishes the flame and leaves Rand (who's asleep) in total darkness, not knowing about his fear of the dark. Have you ever inadvertently "happened upon" another person's greatest fear? We're all afraid of something. What's your greatest fear? Even if you can't say it aloud to the group, would you verbalize it in your heart and ask God to help you face that fear?

7. Brandon Tolliver is one of those characters we "love to hate." Tolliver was a powerful man of influence, and he used that influence to control others. Or at least he tried. Read Proverbs 21:1. What does this Scripture say about powerful people? What does it say about trusting God's plan for our lives?

8. "*The person dying gets to choose.*" What do you think about this statement? When Ben asked Rand to take him home, Rand knew deep down that the trip itself would likely expedite the end to Ben's life, yet he did it anyway because Ben wanted to die at home. Would you have said yes to Ben's request? Why? Or why not? Would you have pressed harder for Ben to undergo further treatment to "buy more time"? Have you walked this particular road with a loved one yet, and if yes, would you share your experience? Be sure and include the blessings too. With great pain always comes great blessing.

9. Did you learn anything new about medicine in the 1800s from this story? Did you realize that procedures such as the fluid extraction from the lungs was performed back then?

10. In Ch. 37, Rand is forced to face his greatest fear. He comes "full circle," so to speak, with the night that he was buried alive, the night he nearly died, but also with the night that changed the course of his life, that led him to become a doctor. Have you ever had a near-death experience? How did it change your outlook on this life? Has God used a tragic, painful event in your life to lead you into the next steps of His will for your life? Please share.

11. At the end of Ch. 38, Rand and Rachel visit Charlie and confront him about something in his past with the railroad. What did they confront him about and why did that have such a profound impact on Rachel? Have you carried a similar weight of guilt over something you've done? Read Psalm 103:8-12. What does the Word say about how

God repays us in relation to our sin? In light of this, how should we deal with our guilt? Read 2 Corinthians 7:10. What does Godly sorrow for sin lead to?

12. To which character in *Within My Heart* did you relate the most? What was it about this character that spoke to you?

13. In the epilogue, Rachel has the following thought, "...she marveled at how God intertwined people's lives. Oftentimes without them ever knowing. But sometimes, like today, she glimpsed His handiwork, the attention He paid to the tiniest details in people's lives, and it gave her fresh hope, fresh courage. And made walking into the unknown a little less frightening knowing He was waiting there for her. For them all." Read Psalm 37:23. What does this Scripture say about God and the details of our lives? What details of your life are you struggling with right now? And perhaps, are there details you haven't yet surrendered to Him? If you were asked to answer *why* you haven't given them to Him yet, what would you say?

14. In this story, a character from a novel in a previous series made a cameo appearance. Who was it? (Hint: *He* was in *Rekindled*.)

15. What was your favorite scene in *Within My Heart*? What was your favorite passage?

16. Through your eyes, what was the take-away message of this story, and what events/characters in the book led you to that conclusion?

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Recipe Ideas for *Within My Heart* Group Gatherings

Rand's Boiled Peanuts

1 pound raw or green peanuts (do NOT use roasted)
1 cup salt

Cover peanuts with water, add salt. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for about three to four hours. Drain and let cool slightly, but I think they're best served warm, along with an icy Diet Dr. Pepper.

Rachel's Buttermilk Biscuits

½ cup cold butter or margarine
2 ¼ cups self rising flour

1 ¼ cups buttermilk (I use low fat)

Cut butter with a sharp knife or pastry blender into 1/4-inch-thick slices. Sprinkle butter slices over flour in bowl. Toss butter with flour. Cut butter into flour with a pastry blender until crumbly and mixture resembles small peas. Cover and chill 10 minutes. Add buttermilk, stirring *just until dry ingredients are moistened*. Don't overmix.

Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface; knead 3 or 4 times, gradually adding additional flour as needed. With floured hands, pat dough into a 3/4-inch-thick rectangle (about 9 x 5 inches). Sprinkle top of dough with additional flour to keep it from being sticky. Fold dough over onto itself in 3 sections, starting with one of the shorter ends. Repeat entire process 2 more times, beginning with pressing into a 3/4-inch-thick dough rectangle (about 9 x 5 inches). Press or pat dough to 1/2-inch thickness on a lightly floured surface; cut with a 2-inch round cutter, and place, side by side, barely touching, on a parchment-paper-lined or lightly greased jelly-roll pan. Bake at 450° F for 13 to 15 minutes or until lightly browned. Remove from oven; brush with 2 Tbsp. melted butter. Be sure to have a couple kinds of jam handy too! *Mmmmm...* Enjoy!

Tamera's Complete Book List:

Rekindled, FOUNTAIN CREEK CHRONICLES, Book 1, Bethany House Publishers (ISBN 0-7642-0108-5)

Revealed, FOUNTAIN CREEK CHRONICLES, Book 2, Bethany House Publishers (ISBN 0-7642-0109-3)

Remembered, FOUNTAIN CREEK CHRONICLES, Book 3, Bethany House Publishers (ISBN 0-7642-0110-7)

Fountain Creek Chronicles Trilogy, Books 1- 3 in one volume, Bethany House Publishers (ISBN 978-0-7642-0736-5)

From a Distance, TIMBER RIDGE REFLECTIONS, Book 1, Bethany House Publishers (ISBN 978-0-7642-0389-3)

Beyond This Moment, TIMBER RIDGE REFLECTIONS, Book 2, Bethany House Publishers (ISBN 978-0-7642-0390-9)

Within My Heart, TIMBER RIDGE REFLECTIONS, Book 3, Bethany House Publishers (ISBN 978-0-7642-0391-6)

The Inheritance, *Women of Faith Fiction*, Thomas Nelson Publishers (ISBN 978-1-59554-632-6)