

BOOK GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Down By the River

1. At mid years and widowed for several years, Grace Conley is at a turning point in her life, trying to decide on the next direction to take. What decision does she make for her future while visiting in Townsend? Have you ever found yourself at a turning point stage in your own life? What new direction did you take?
2. Life changes are exciting but also hard. What did Grace Conley's family, especially her children Mike, Ken, Elaine and Margaret, think about her decision to buy the bed and breakfast in Townsend? What were their reasons for not wanting Grace to move and make this change? What did you think about their attitudes?
3. Realtor Jack Teague doesn't have much confidence in Grace Conley's ability to run a successful bed and breakfast either. Why? Do you think people often underestimate the abilities of women who have not been consistently in the paid work force? What plans did Grace's family have for her that were different from her own desires?
4. What were your first impressions of Jack Teague? What were Grace's first impressions? How did your original impressions about Jack—and Grace's original impressions about Jack—change as the book progressed?
5. Besides Grace's own heart attraction to the bed and breakfast for sale in Townsend, several other factors influenced her to decide to buy the business. What were these? Do you believe God sends helps, or what pastor Vincent Westbrooke termed confirmations, when we are struggling with decisions about new directions in our lives? What did you think about Zola Devon as a helper to Grace? How did her words influence Grace naming the bed and breakfast The Mimosa Inn?
6. Grace Conley and Jack Teague are attracted to each other from the start. Why do they both not want to encourage the attraction between them? What changes through the book bring them closer together? How is Grace's relationship different with Jack from the relationship she had with her husband Charles?
7. Secondary characters in a book are often fun – and can often greatly enhance book and life stories. What did you think of Ashleigh Anne Layton? Did she make you think of anyone you know? Did later events in the story change your opinion of Ashleigh in any way?
8. What changes did Grace make to the Mimosa Inn? How did she change and begin to develop as a person as she began to run the inn? How did opening the crafts shop at the Mimosa begin to change Grace's perception of her talents? How had Grace's gifts as a crafter been discouraged by her family?

9. Grace's return to the Mimosa brings her back near her own family in South Knoxville, her father and mother Mel and Dottie Richey, her brother Leonard and her sister Myra. Why has Grace been estranged somewhat from her family—and especially from her sister Myra? What part did Charles family, and especially his mother Jane Conley, play in this? How did you feel about the impact Jane had on the Conley's life and especially on Grace's and Margaret's life? Have you ever experience difficulties with your family like these?

10. Jack's girls, Meredith and Morgan, played strong character roles in this book. How did the twins first meet Grace and how did they influence her to come to Townsend? How did the developing relationship between Grace and Meredith and Morgan impact Grace's relationship with Jack? As the book progressed, what did you learn about the twins' mother? What caused the girls to later fly out to California to meet her and what happened in that visit?

11. There are frequent contrasts between the lifestyles of women in this book. What are some of these? How do differences in finances, personality, and inherent beauty impact the women's lifestyles – as with Grace and her sister Myra? How do life choices, as whether to pursue career or to stay home in a homemaking role create differences? In what ways do Jack's aunt Bebe Butler and Jack's mother Althea Teague portray warmly how both of these different lifestyle choices can be healthy and good ones?

12. Just as Grace is settling into her new life in Townsend, her daughter Margaret shows up. Why has Margaret come? When Vincent Westbooke meets Margaret he believes he's been given a sign from God that he should marry Margaret. Why does this seem unlikely to Grace? What changes occur in Margaret's life during her visit in Townsend, through her interaction with the church pianist Jo Carson, Vincent, and her mother?

13. When Althea has her heart attack, how does Jack handle the news? How does this time of stress cause him to fall back into old familiar behaviors he is trying to leave behind? How does Grace become involved in finding Jack when he leaves the hospital but doesn't return? How does this event affect Grace's feelings for Jack?

14. Faith can impact and change lives. How is this shown in many ways throughout this book? In particular, how are Margaret and Jack impacted by a faith decision in their lives? Why had Margaret and Jack not been in a strong place of faith even though they had both attended church and been raised in Christian families?

15. What did you think about young pastor Vincent Westbrooke? How had he become a minister? What was different about his beliefs than what you see in many church pastors? Margaret becomes angry in the book when she learns about a new facet of Vincent's life. What is this? What factors eventually bring Vincent and Margaret together?

16. At one point Margaret tells her Mother: *I feel different here, Mother. It's as though all the rules I've lived by don't seem to apply. It's kind of unsettling.* In what ways are Margaret's and Grace's lives—and the lives of others in the book—changed dramatically by their move to Townsend. Do you think moves to new places can facilitate changes in people? Have you ever experienced extensive life changes through moving to a new place, meeting new people, or encountering a different culture it brought?

17. The mysterious stalker in the book, who is termed Crazy Man, causes many upsets and problems spying on people and leaving little notes and warnings. What were some of these? Many of his interferences caused only annoyance but others were more frightening. How did his notes about little Ruby upset everyone and why? How did a later event when he follows Margaret frighten everyone? How did his leaving a note for Jack's girls cause even more problems and upset? Who does the book finally reveal that Crazy Man is? What reasons were given for why he did the things he did?

18. What did you like most about this book? Which character was your favorite? What aspects of this story seemed most surprising—and most satisfying?