

Discussion Guide

DIVINE REVERSAL



SUSAN JOY SIMKINS, Ph.D.

susanjoysimkins.com

Welcome to this discussion guide for Divine Reversal by Susan Joy Simkins!

Told with honesty and grace, this memoir is a raw, inspiring journey through trauma, faith, and redemption. Use these questions for personal reflection or to spark lively conversations in a book club or small group. Feel free to discuss the ones that resonate most deeply with you, adapt them to your group, and share personal connections. In a group setting, start with icebreakers like "What surprised you most?" to get everyone talking. Grab some snacks, and let's dive in!

The chapters are grouped chronologically to help discussions flow naturally. Each section blends story reflections, themes, personal application, and spiritual discovery. Some questions encourage deeper faith-based conversations, focusing on themes like God's faithfulness, forgiveness, and divine healing.

Introduction: A Reluctant Storyteller (Pages 2-4)

Susan begins with her confession about hiding her story and how sharing it brought healing and family connection. This sets the tone for vulnerability.

1. Susan describes her initial resistance to writing and sharing her story as "kicking and screaming." What fears or hesitations have you had about sharing your own challenging experiences? How might opening up benefit you?
2. She quotes Rick Warren: "Your greatest life messages... will come out of your deepest hurts" (The Purpose-Driven Life, 2002). How does this ring true (or not) in Susan's introduction? Can you think of a personal "hurt" that's shaped your message?
3. The introduction ends with "So here goes!" What do you hope to gain from reading her full story? Do you have any "what if" predictions for how her narrative might inspire you?

Introduction: A Reluctant Storyteller

(Pages 2-4)

(continued)

4. Susan mentions her family's silence around trauma. How does this mirror or contrast with how your family handles tough topics?
5. Susan wrestles with shame but chooses transparency for others' freedom. How does this reflect biblical themes like light exposing darkness (Genesis 1:1-3)? Where in your life might sharing a "hidden" story bring healing?

Part 1: Childhood Shadows in Paradise (Chapters 1–9, Pages 5–47)

These early chapters paint a vivid picture of Susan's chaotic home life in St. Thomas, from domestic violence to her academic drive as an escape.

1. Susan's paradise island hides a hellish existence. How does this contrast between beauty and pain make her story more powerful? What's a "paradise" in your life that masks deeper struggles?
2. Describe Susan's relationship with her dad. How does his alcoholism and schizophrenia shape the family? If you could talk to young Susan as a big sister or big brother, what advice would you give her?
3. School becomes Susan's refuge. How does her perfectionism (like memorizing Psalm 119) show her coping mechanism? Have you ever used achievement to escape personal pain?
4. In Chapter 8, Susan's birthday party turns disastrous. What "lasts" (e.g., family photos or trips) does she mourn? What small family rituals do you cherish that might seem ordinary?

Part 1: Childhood Shadows in Paradise

(Chapters 1–9, Pages 5–47)

(continued)

5. Dad's criminal life and prison time bring public shame. How does this affect Susan's self-worth? How might the situation have changed if the family had called for help earlier?
6. Susan's mom insists that her daughters have contact with their dad despite the danger. Is this loving or enabling? Reflect: How has a parent's "staying" impacted your view of relationships?
7. Themes of fear and control run strong in this part of the memoir. What Bible verses or segments from these chapters resonate with you personally?
8. Susan's early prayers for Dad's salvation show childlike faith amid chaos. How does this echo stories like the prodigal son (Luke 15)? Where has God met you in your own "chaos"?

Part 2: Escape and Exploitation (Chapters 10–24, Pages 48–112)

Susan flees to the U.S., faces cultural shock, and enters a toxic church relationship with Elder D, leading to pregnancy and isolation.

1. The escape to Evansville is a culture shock. What surprises you most about the shift from island life to mainland struggles? If you relocated suddenly, what would be your most significant adjustment?
2. Elder D starts as a surrogate father but turns predatory. How does Susan's vulnerability (from Dad's abuse) make her susceptible? What red flags from her story can help others in similar situations identify predatory behavior?
3. Susan's high school isolation contrasts with school being a haven in St. Thomas. How does her ethnicity and poverty amplify her adjustment difficulties? Share a time you felt like an outsider and how it shaped you.
4. The abortions and secrecy devastate Susan. What emotions hit you hardest here? Do you think the outcome would have changed if Susan had confided in someone earlier?

Part 2: Escape and Exploitation **(Chapters 10–24, Pages 48–112)** ***(continued)***

5. Mom's reaction to the scandal strains their bond. How does this reflect broader family dynamics in trauma? Have you seen forgiveness heal rifts like these?
6. Susan's college success at Purdue shows resilience, but fear lingers. What role does faith play in her survival? Pick a quote from these chapters that motivates you.
7. Elder D's control mirrors Dad's. Discuss the cycle of abuse. How does Susan break free, even temporarily?
8. Elder D twists Scripture to manipulate Susan. How does this highlight the danger of distorted faith? Reflect on a time when religion felt more like control than freedom. How did you reclaim true faith?

Part 3: Healing and Breakthroughs (Chapters 25-48, Pages 113-239)

Graduate school, spiritual renewal, and family changes bring growth, but pain persists. Susan confronts her past through church and self-reflection.

1. Purdue and Ohio State are havens, but single motherhood adds pressure. What's your take on Susan's "crazy" choice to pursue grad school? How does she balance academics and parenting?
2. From legalism and exploitation to healing and support, the church illustrates divine reversal in Susan's life. What shifts in Susan's faith journey stand out? How has a community helped or hurt your spiritual growth?
3. Susan's writing phobia peaks during comps. What's at stake if she fails? How does this mirror real-life fears of success or failure in your life?
4. Dad's death brings mixed closure. How does forgiveness change Susan's grief? Reflect: What's one "unforgivable" thing you've released?

Part 3: Healing and Breakthroughs **(Chapters 25-48, Pages 113-239)** ***(continued)***

5. Oma and Mom's faith legacy shines through. Who in your life models quiet strength? Share a "divine reversal" moment from these chapters.
6. Susan's experience of peace in Chapter 35 "transcends all understanding" (Philippians 4:7 NIV). Has a "God moment" transformed your perspective?
7. Tenure fears dominate. How does faith fuel her drive? Fun question: If you were Susan's cheerleader, what pep talk would you give her? Who in your life needs a similar pep talk?
8. Forgiveness in Ch. 38 echoes Ephesians 4:32. How does Susan's process show God's grace at work? Where do you need to extend (or receive) forgiveness today?
9. Susan's revival in Ch. 46-47 feels like Pentecost (Acts 2). Share a time God's Spirit brought unexpected joy or a breakthrough in your faith walk.

Part 4: Triumph and New Beginnings (Chapters 49–71, Pages 240–End)

Susan secures tenure, marries John, and reflects on reversals. The epilogue ties themes of faith and family.

1. Susan's "dream world" drawing from Chapter 8 becomes reality in Chapter 55 (Psalm 37:4). How does this show God's long-game planning? What's a childhood dream you've seen fulfilled in your life, big or small?
2. Forgiving Elder D and herself is gut-wrenching. What surprises you about her process? What if she hadn't forgiven? How might her life differ?
3. Susan's high school reunion heals old wounds. Share a "full circle" moment from the book. How does God rewrite pain?
4. Susan's journey from shame to joy aligns with Psalm 30:5 ("weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning"). How does this encourage you in tough seasons?
5. Amber's role evolves from daughter to ally. Reflect on their bond. What's the most significant "win" in Susan's parenting?

Part 4: Triumph and New Beginnings **(Chapters 49–71, Pages 240–End)** ***(continued)***

6. John's role in Susan's healing mirrors God's redemptive love (Hosea). How does this show human relationships reflecting divine ones? Where has God used people to heal you?
7. Marriage to John feels like a fairy tale. Discuss the contrasts with Susan's past relationships. What makes their bond work despite their differences?
8. The epilogue celebrates reversals. How did God "work all things for good" (Romans 8:28) in Susan's life? What theme hits home most (e.g., forgiveness, faith, or family)? How has Susan's story changed your view of redemption?
9. Fun twist: If Susan's story became a movie, who plays her? What's the soundtrack?

Whole-Book Discussion Questions

To wrap up your read, these broader questions explore the memoir's big ideas, structure, and impact.

1. Divine Reversal flips pain into purpose. Name three "reversals" in Susan's life. Which one inspires you most, and why?
2. Faith is central. How does Susan's view of God evolve from fear-based to love-filled? Where do you see similar shifts in your beliefs?
3. Abuse cycles (family, church) are raw here. What breaks them for Susan? Share safely: How do you spot or stop cycles in your world?
4. Susan's writing fear mirrors her life story. How does overcoming procrastination and perfectionism symbolize her growth? What's a fear you've "reversed"?
5. Mother-daughter bonds shine as the relationship moves from tension to teamwork. What role does Amber play in Susan's healing? Reflect on your own family ties.

Whole-Book Discussion Questions (continued)

6. Forgiveness is tough! Susan forgives her father, Elder D, and herself (including her past self). What's the hardest forgiveness for you, and why?
7. Themes of shame versus dignity recur. How does Susan reclaim dignity? Where do you see these themes in today's culture?
8. Throughout the book, humor peeks through dark times. How does it lighten the load? Share a funny reversal from your life.
9. Forgiveness and love conquer fear (1 John 4:18). How does Susan's story embody this? What fear might God's love "cast out" in your life today?
10. Susan's career success is miraculous. Discuss work-faith balance. How does her story challenge "hustle culture"?
11. The epilogue ties up loose ends. What's your biggest takeaway on redemption? How can this book help someone in pain?
12. The memoir mixes timelines and poems. How do poems enhance the narrative? Which one resonates most?

Whole-Book Discussion Questions

(continued)

13. Susan writes to break abuse cycles. How might her story empower victims? Families? Churches?
14. Group challenge: Share one "divine reversal" you're grateful for.
15. Fun twist: If Divine Reversal inspires a sequel, what chapter comes next for Susan? (Bonus: Cast John and Amber in a movie version!)
16. The book ends with grace and joy (e.g., Isaiah 55:12-13). How does Susan's faith journey illustrate God's faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22-23)? Where do you see His "reversals" in Scripture?
17. Susan's prayers and breakthroughs echo Psalm 34:18 ("The Lord is close to the brokenhearted"). How has God drawn near in your brokenness? Pray for one another now.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To learn more about what divine reversal is and how to receive the grand restoration God has for you, visit divinereversal.com.

For anyone haunted by past trauma and wondering if they're broken beyond repair, *Devastation to Restoration* is my invitation to you to let Jesus into those hidden places of your heart. Through devotional reflections, Scripture, prayer prompts, and honest stories, my hope is to walk beside you, as a friend and fellow traveler, reminding you that your pain does not have the final word. Learn more at susanjoysimkins.com.

*Grace and peace be multiplied to you,
Susan*