



Book Club Guide



Letter From the Author



Dear Book Club Coordinator,

What an honor to be considered for your June book club, especially with so many good books to choose from.

There's a mystique about summer, isn't there? Maybe it's all the romantic songs about the season, or the glorious freedom of no school and hot afternoons spent swimming with friends or riding bikes through the neighborhood, listening for the ice cream truck, or anticipating the family vacation.

Do you have that one summer logged in your memory as "the best" summer of all? Were you a teen driving for the first time? Perhaps you were a newlywed setting up house. Maybe your best summer was when you became a mom or grandma. Maybe you're still waiting for that one glorious summer. It's okay to say you're still waiting. Good things come to those who wait.

For most of us, somewhere along the way, we had *that* summer. Mine was the June, July, and August between junior high and high school. My parents had given me some freedom, and I had a friend with a car. I'd landed a good part-time job at Publix supermarket and had finally dropped the "baby fat." The dark-eyed, dark-haired stockboy who winked at me every time he passed my register filled me with butterflies.

Yet of all my summers, one thing remained true: A good book was usually involved.

In the summer of 2020, I started toying with a book set in the 1970s. The original title was *The Summer of '77*. I started developing the four protagonists, best friends since kindergarten, who wanted the best summer of their lives after high school graduation.

What they expected turned into the unexpected.



For Summer, Spring, Autumn, and Snow—or the Four Seasons, as they called themselves—their carefree summer of saying good-bye to high school and hello to college turned into a journey of discovery.

Instead of sleeping late, shopping for college, and weekday road trips to the beach, the unexpected handed them an opportunity to become women, face their fears and mistakes, and challenge the one thing they believed would *never* falter—their friendship.

Twenty years later, in the summer of 1997, the Seasons are established and successful—well, three of the four, anyway. One thing is missing . . .

I loved these four girls by the end of the book, finding a piece of myself in each of them, and wanting to visit fictional Tumbleweed, Oklahoma, for a bit of music and a burger at O’Sullivan’s.

The Best Summer of Our Lives is a nostalgic, poignant read for all ages—from seventeen to seventy-seven—reminding us throughout life’s ups and downs that we are never alone.

Here’s to this summer being blessed and fruitful! Maybe it will even surprise you in a best and unexpected way.

I’d love to join your book club virtually or in person. For virtual, reach out through the “Request Author Teleconference” form under “Resources” on the Open Book website here:

<https://www.bethanyhouseopenbook.com/author-teleconference-request>

If you’re in the coastal, Central Florida area, and your book club is reading *The Best Summer of Our Lives*, contact me at rachel@rachelhauck.com.

Blessings,

Rachel

Rachel Hauck

<https://rachelhauck.com/>



Meeting Inspiration

Wear or bring any outfits, shoes, hats, handbags, or scarves you have from the '70s. Tell the story behind them and why you kept them.

Bring your '70s pictures and memorabilia.

For younger readers, talk about why the '70s appeal today. What stands out to you from that era?

Listen to the Spotify playlist linked in this guide. What songs were your favorites back in the day?

Play vinyl records on a record player.



Read the deleted scene featured in this book club guide.

Share your own testimony of meeting "the Preacher." People don't share their testimonies very much these days, and this can be a great opportunity to fellowship with your book group.



Listen now:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2olslsR170py3MHeW6mQzY>

The song "Let It Burn" is by Eddie Tucker, a good friend of mine. I listened to that song nonstop from the summer of '21 through the fall of '22 while writing and rewriting and editing *The Best Summer of Our Lives*. That song ministered to me as I entered into, walked through, and came out of a difficult season. I STILL listen to it but have added the whole EP to my rotation. It's almost like I can't start writing until I hear one of his songs. Ha!

—Rachel Hauck



Listen Here



Character Quiz

Take this quiz to discover which character from *The Best Summer of Our Lives* you are most like!

<https://www.opinionstage.com/page/926cfcb1-4894-4734-ad87-44091b705c1b>



Scan Here





Discussion Questions

1. Summer, Spring, Autumn, and Snow have a unique relationship. Growing up, I remember how the dynamics between three or four friends could get messy sometimes. What do you think makes friendships special?
2. Friendships can wound as much as heal. Was there a time in your life when a friend let you down? How did you move on? How did you heal the relationship?
3. Fear is a real factor in today's world. When Lily learned of the Camp Scott murders, she feared for the Tumblers in her charge. How can we be aware of dangers, yet not live in fear? How do we keep fear from being a stronghold?



4. Summer struggles to feel accepted by her father. Was it in her imagination, or was it a real truth? How can we confront the lies we believe of ourselves or others and overcome them?

5. The Four Seasons go to Camp Tumbleweed with secrets. Were they right to hold in those tidbits? Should they have shared? Why do you think Autumn didn't confess she wanted to go to cosmetology school, or Snow to UCLA? Why do you think Spring wouldn't want the support of her friends if she believed she was pregnant? Are there limits to friendships? What factors keep us from confessing our secrets or plans to our friends?

6. The Preacher calls Summer to "sing for Him," but she doesn't understand and enters a desert season. Have you been through a desert season? Are you in one now?

7. Have you ever blurted something you didn't mean to, like Autumn did? How did you respond? How did the hearer respond?



8. At what lengths do we shield our children from the truth about their parentage or past? Was Babs right to hide the truth from Snow?

9. How have you confronted the lies you believe? Your fears or worries? What is your “jump in the lake” moment?

10. Who is your favorite character and why? Talk about how Jesus is a friend to all.





Deleted Scene

Summer
Camp Tumbleweed
June 2017

Out of the director's office and through the lodge, she stepped onto the grounds of Camp Tumbleweed and breathed in the fresh scent of morning and Lake Skiatook.

The first of Tumblers for the summer of 2017 arrived next week. A lot of things had changed in the eighteen years she'd been running the camp. A lot of things stayed the same.

Not long after the Seasons reconciled in '97, Levi proposed. They married six weeks later in October. When Josie later offered to sell them the camp, they bought it, and Summer reopened Camp Tumbleweed in '99, as its director. These days, Camp Tumbleweed was twice the size it was in the '70s.

And so was the spirit of friendship.

Snow asked Summer to write the theme song for her new rom-com *Come Sing with Me*, so she spent peaceful fall evenings in '98 on the back porch, penning a tune with the same title, as Levi rocked their newborn, Levi Foley II—or Deuce, as they called the little guy with her husband's eyes.

In 2000, the first year of the new millennium, the Seasons and their hubbies walked the red carpet with Snow and Loudon. Greta walked on cloud nine for a year—okay, maybe for ten years—after *that* night in Hollywood. She still talks about it. She shows all of her patients the boatload of photos hanging on her office wall. A good many of them were of her photobombing the stars while they were doing interviews.

Summer's song started to get radio play. To everyone's surprise, *Come Sing with Me* was covered by several bands, ranging from pop to alternative rock. Who knew?

Levi joked, "*Maybe we should sell the ranch and move to Nashville.*"

Ha ha. No thanks.

By then, they'd given Deuce a little sister, Berkley, so Levi would have to blast Summer out of their ranch-style nest if he ever *really* wanted to move. Which he didn't. She was happy to be writing again and producing the melodies of her heart, but she was even happier to be home with her husband and babies.

Last year, 2016, a newcomer to country music, Buck Mathews, covered an obscure song of Summer's called "Golden Haze" and hit number one on the country charts and number ten on pop. Her music continued to find life through other's voices.



She updated “The Preacher” lyrics to reflect who she now knew Him to be. So much more than a Preacher. He was her Lord. She recorded her own version and sold CDs at O’Sullivan’s and the Camp Tumbleweed store.

Camp Tumbleweed continued to grow. This year, they had seventy Tumblers per week. Next year, she hoped to add ten more. She had twelve counselors and ten staffers, many of whom were former Tumblers, including the daughters of all the Seasons—five in all who came back to help the girls have “the best summer of their lives,” which had become the camp’s unofficial catchphrase.

She also had a crew of very special helpers: Mom and her husband, John, whom she meet online!—*Really, Mom?*—and Dad and Babs.

Right now, the four of them were walking toward the cabins, carrying armloads of bedding. They’d all retired around the same time and signed up to be Camp Tumbleweed’s official cooks and housekeepers and much-needed “grandparents.”

Mom and John bought the Tumble Time Laundromat, installed proper air conditioning—the entire town sang the “Hallelujah!” chorus—and for a while, the four of them trucked into town every summer Saturday to wash the linens. When Summer expanded the camp, Dad and Babs bought the shop next to Tumble Time, knocked down a few walls, added more machines and a reading nook, hired full-time attendants, and surrendered the camp’s laundry duty.

Not many people needed a laundromat in 2017, but the place stayed busy, and every now and then, someone down on their luck would peek inside. Mom or John or the attendant on duty would invite them in for free wash-and-fold service and a meal voucher at O’Sullivan’s.

“The world looks a lot better when your clothes are clean and fresh,” John said. *“And when your belly is full.”*

Life seemed so sweet now. At fifty-eight, Summer Wilde Foley, had become somebody. If she was any more content with her life, she’d burst. She didn’t the need fame and fortune, or a stage. She just needed be who the Preacher made her to be.

After the summer of ’97, Summer dug a big ol hole in the ground and buried her hatchets. Anger. Hate. Bitterness. Resentment. Her sense of failure and self-loathing.

It wasn’t easy to forget and forgive. She struggled. Even tried to dig up a hatchet or two a few times, especially over the way she’d treated her parents, the Seasons, her failed music career, and her disregard for herself and the men she’d been with. But the Preacher always whispered some sense into her.

“Why are you trying to remember what I forgot?”

She marveled at His friendship. Marveled that He blessed her when she’d ignored Him for so long. Marveled that He blessed her with a man like Levi.

Twenty years later, she had no regrets about accepting the Preacher’s invitation to “sing for Me.”

“Hey, Mom!” Summer’s daughters Berkley and Kitty stood beside the Ford F-250 camp truck. “We’re going to pick up Aunt Snow and Aunt Autumn. Meet you at O’Sullivan’s? Five o’clock?”



“Five o’clock at O’Sullivan’s.” Oh, she was proud of her girl duo and of Deuce. Spring arrived yesterday to spend a bit of time with Greta and her family before the craziness of camp. Greta and Darrian had two boys and a girl, the oldest a senior in high school. Tonight, they would all gather at the Yeagers’ place to reminisce and catch up with one another.

There were five Seasons now, including Greta, but the original four always returned for the first week of camp—just to be together, then to be with the Tumblers.

Spring never went back to practicing law. She made it as a full-time author. Her first big hit, *The Camp Girls*, was a semi-autobiographical tale of her life with the Seasons. It hit number one on the *New York Times*.

Snow became one of the biggest producers in Hollywood. She and Loudon and beautiful Olive, an entrepreneur in the internet world, joined the Foleys, Mom and John, and Dad and Babs for Christmas every other year. They were one big happy family.

Autumn sold her cosmetology school and both shops, *The Kitchen* and *The Kitchen Too*, when she met her husband, Barker, while visiting Snow in LA. She lived in Santa Barbara now and swam every morning, golfed, and volunteered at her church’s soup kitchen. Yet she still managed to “big-sister” her siblings from two thousand miles away. She and the Preacher had become good friends.

“Hey, you.” Levi waved to her as his truck bounced over the grounds toward the firepit where he’d stack firewood for this week’s camp. His smile still melted the sun—and her. He had a touch of gray at his temples now, but time hadn’t slowed him down.

“The Seasons’ cabins are all set.” Mom walked toward her, wearing her hiking boots, khakis, and Camp Tumbleweed T-shirt. It was amazing how she transformed from high-powered business executive to nature girl in an instant.

“Berkley and Kitty went to get Snow and Autumn,” Summer said.

“Starlight, Twilight, Moonglow, and Sunglow are ready for you.” It was a perk for the Seasons to stay the week in their old cabins.

“It’s not the same without Moxie, is it?” Mom said, glancing around. “I’ll never get used to her being gone. Sometimes I still hear her singing in the kitchen.”

Moxie worked with Mom through the ’80s and came knocking on Summer’s door when she heard Camp Tumbleweed would open again. At ninety-one, she helped set up the camp kitchen. Help? No, she did it by herself. She worked on staff until the summer of ’04, when she went to bed one night and woke up in heaven. She was ninety-six.

Her picture was the centerpiece on the Camp Tumbleweed Wall, a pictorial retrospective of the camp dating back to the 1940s.

“Are you singing at O’Sullivan’s tonight?” Mom watched her.

“Do you think the Seasons would let me *not*?”

It was her last set until camp was over. Over the summer, talented acts came through town and filled the place with good music. Tank still owned the diner-slash-drugstore, but Sooner’s son, Will, was set to take over in the next year.

A flicker of light from beyond the old firepit caught Summer’s attention. “Excuse me, Mom.”



She paused on the edge of the meadow. The Preacher stood between the shadow and light, wearing his bell-bottoms, skinny tie, and blue Oxford button-down. His eyes—oh, those eyes!—were like flames of fire.

“Hello.” She kept her voice low, and she could only hope he heard the welcome. “It’s been a long time.”

He didn’t speak, but her heart resonated with *“I’m with you every day.”*

“How am I doing?”

“You sing for Me,” He said. “You sing for Me every day.”

Summer caught the tear on the corner of her eye. “I finally got it. To sing for You means to live for You.”

“Babe?” Levi’s voice startled her. “The contractor sent pictures of the fixtures for the new cabins. Do you want to—Hey, are you all right?” His strong arm came around her.

“I’m more than all right.” When she looked through the shadow and light again, the Preacher had disappeared. “What’s this about fixtures?”

Somehow, she knew she’d never see Him in this manner again. But He was with her, and that’s all she needed to know. He was the One who led her through every season.

“You wanted to approve the fixtures in the new cabins.”

“Right, okay. But can you—” Summer patted her pockets for her phone. “Hold on a sec, Levi.”

She dialed her father.

“Summie? Why are you calling? I’m standing in the middle of camp. I can see you over by the meadow. What did Levi do?”

She laughed. “Nothing. He’s good.” More than good. “I was wondering if I could ask you something about the summer of ’77.”

“What about it?”

“Do you remember when I called you from the phone booth at O’Sullivan’s? I wanted to skip Camp Tumbleweed, come home, and pick up trash off I-10.”

“Yes, and I told you to stick it out. That it would probably be the best summer of your life.”

“Well, it was, Dad. Unexpected and painful but beautiful in a way I never imagined.”

“So your old man was right.”

“Don’t get cocky on me now. But yeah, you were right.”

Looking back, she believed the summer of ’77 absolutely was the best of her life. It—all of it—brought her to where she was always meant to be.

THE END



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