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A Sounding Brass

by Shelley Bates



About the Book

Claire Montoya's life doesn't fit her anymore. Brought up in a strict church in the small town of Hamilton Falls, Claire has seen disgrace fall on the leaders she trusted and watched her friends reject their faith.

When Luke Fisher is invited to preach at one of their gatherings, Claire finds herself drawn to the handsome radio evangelist. She joins his radio station staff as a bookkeeper and, although she initially enjoys taking part in Luke's vision for the community, she begins to realize that certain things about this powerful personality don't add up. Complicating matters, investigator Ray Harper is hanging around the studio asking disturbing questions-and making an impression of his own on young Claire.

Who is right: the nationally known evangelist or the suspicious cop? And more important, to whom can Claire trust her heart? In **A Sounding Brass**, questions require answers of total honesty and an eye for eternal consequences. Will Claire find these answers-and love?

Discussion Guide

1. Have you ever heard the expression toxic church? What do you think it means? Were the Elect a toxic church? Have you yourself ever been involved with a toxic church? If so, what was your experience?

2. First Corinthians 13 tells us that without charity, no matter how eloquent a person may be, he or she becomes like a sounding brass or a crashing cymbal. Did Luke Fisher convince the Elect that he was a "real" evangelist possessing the love of God? Or does he? If so, how did he do it? Were the people simply starstruck?

3. When he introduced Luke to the congregation, Owen Blanchard urged them to "try the spirits and see if they are of God." With their history, were the Elect able to do this? How might you yourself do so?

4. Claire Montoya struggled with self-image issues. In a toxic church, many women find that decisions are made for them under the guise of a "womanly example." Do you think such practices are valid? What are the advantages and disadvantages of such an example?

5. The toxic church can impose restrictions on its members in any aspect of their lives. Would you allow such restrictions in your own church? Do you think it was reasonable for Claire to stay in Hamilton Falls at the Shepherd's request when she wanted to move away? If you had had her background, what would you have done?

6. At what point did Claire realize she had let the Elect leadership make all of her decisions for her? Do you consider the needs of your church before making your own life decisions?

7. Claire's relationship with her parents was strained because their views on living up to the church's expectations differed from hers. Is this reasonable or realistic? Do your own views on behavior and dress differ from those of your parents' generation?

8. One of the themes of **A Sounding Brass** is that "faith comes by hearing." Investigator Ray Harper was an auditory learner, as opposed to a visual learner. In what way do you learn the best? Was Ray's experience realistic?

9. Have you ever heard the voice of God audibly? If so, what was it like? Do you think God speaks to people in this day and age?

Author Bio

A transplanted Canadian, Shelley Bates grew up on Vancouver Island and currently lives in California. Whether typing search warrants and making undercover phone calls for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or editing marketing collateral for the high-tech industry in Silicon Valley, Shelley has always found that everyone has a story. Most people have stopped telling her theirs in case she puts them in her books.

Shelley earned an M.A. in Writing Popular Fiction from Seton Hill University in Pennsylvania in 2002 and sold her thesis to a major publisher that year. It subsequently became a double finalist in the 2004 National Readers Choice Awards.

Grounds to Believe, the debut novel in her Elect Trilogy of inspirational women's fiction, won the grand prize in the Lagniappe for Literacy national fiction contest and is a finalist for the 2005 RITA Award for Best Inspirational. The second book in the trilogy, **Pocketful of Pearls**, will be an August 2005 release from Warner Faith, and the last book, **A Sounding Brass**, will be published in August 2006.

Between books, Shelley enjoys traveling with her husband, playing the piano and Celtic harp, making period costumes, and catering to her flock of rescue chickens. Visit Shelley on the Web at http://www.shelleybates.com.

Critical Praise

"This is a book that resonates in the heart. I literally couldn't put it down."

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