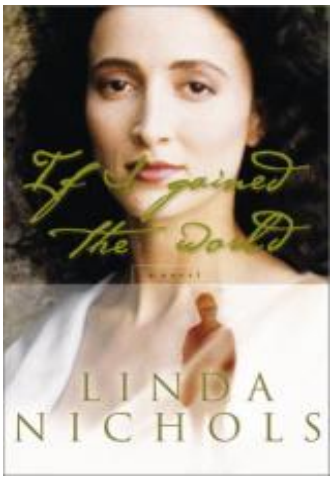
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If I Gained the World

by Linda Nichols



About the Book

Lenore hadn't planned on changing their lives forever when she posed her question to Daniel?.Daniel's body tensed. Lenore stayed perfectly still, though somehow hoping his words would make things right. But no words came. She knew then what his answer would be, and she knew she had taken everything, everything, and in one foolish gesture, she had wagered it and lost.

Lenore and Daniel have a cozy home and a wonderful son, a mirror image of his father. Lenore loves her life and wants nothing to change?except one thing?.As innocent as it seemed, her request is the beginning of the end, and their life together unravels. Lenore takes little Scottie and begins her quest for meaning, purpose, and a new start?as far away from those bittersweet memories as she can get?.How will these broken hearts move past their pain and find their way to faithfulness, grace, and love?

Discussion Guide

1. What is a marriage? Is it a legal definition or a lifestyle definition? Is there a distinction in your mind between a couple married in the church and one wed "outside" the church?

2. Describe the role of physical appearance in this book. Who is beautiful and who is plain? What do these labels reveal about the characters, and do they change throughout the book?

3. What do the main characters' jobs (Daniel as actor and Lenore as nurse) reveal about the characters?

4. The change in these characters upon giving their lives to Christ seems almost instantaneous. How do their experiences compare to yours or to that of others you have observed?

5. Lenore's name means "light" or "light of the sun." Discuss how she lives up to her name.

6. Both Daniel and Lenore (at different times) are faced with hitting rock bottom. What do you admire about their particular responses, and what, if anything, do you think they should have done differently? Talk about how you made it through some of the darkest times of your life.

7. Lenore keeps things (her diagnosis, the name of her ex-lover) from Erik Ashland, and later she keeps the discovery of the lump in her breast from Al. Why do you think she holds these secrets? Should she?

8. Think of the different homes portrayed in the novel (Daniel and Lenore together, Daniel alone, Lenore and Scott, the communal home). Which is the truest representation of "home" as you see it? What are the elements that make up this purest embodiment of home? How did your childhood home life meet or miss those qualities? Likewise, how does your present life?

9. Which character do you think benefits most from living in the communal house? Which character sacrifices the most?

10. Domesticity (cooking food, keeping house, working on wood projects) has deep meaning for the characters. What do these things represent?

11. The core theme of the book comes from the verse suggesting the folly and frustration of seeking to "gain the world." Give some examples of what you think this phrase means. Name a real-life person who you think best exemplifies someone who has gained the world. What meaning does their life have?

12. "A new normal" is a phrase that gained great significance in the days following 9/11. What are some life events that have forced you to find a new normal in your own life? Is there any trauma or change too great to reestablish normality?

13. Extra: Read Edgar Allen Poe's poem "Lenore" and discuss the narrator's thoughts about his beloved as compared to Daniel's vision of Lenore in the book. (This poem can be found online.)

Author Bio

Linda Nichols, a graduate of the University of Washington, is a novelist with a unique gift of touching readers' hearts with her stories. NOT A SPARROW FALLS, her bestselling debut novel for the Christian fiction market, was a 2003 Christy Award finalist in the contemporary category. Linda and her family make their home in Tacoma, Washington.

Critical Praise

"Nichols's follow-up to **Not a Sparrow Falls** is rich and unsentimental. Her main characters are skillfully developed and draw readers into their struggles. This high-quality relationship novel is highly recommended for most collections."

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