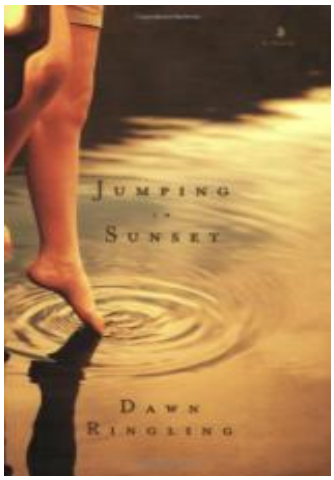
Jumping in Sunset

by Dawn Ringley



About the Book

Pamela Thornton has the perfect life?a comfortable faith, a 20?year marriage, prestigious friends, a great job as a photographer for a tourist magazine, and a solid relationship with her college-bound daughter, Angie. But all falls apart when her husband, Paul, announces he's leaving her to marry Cindy, a friend from their church.

Written primarily from Pamela and Paul's points of view, **Jumping in Sunset** chronicles the life of a Christian family during marital crisis. Angie's point-of-view is interspersed via the journal entries she writes while away at school.

Pamela's long-time friend Starla becomes Pamela's life-line when, after Angie leaves for college, Pamela is left alone to struggle through the ensuing legal and emotional mess Paul leaves her with. During the early, hardest weeks, Starla insists that Pamela join her at a lakeside cabin near their mutual home town in Northern Minnesota. Pamela acquiesces?though she dreads the idea of going back to a place she's always felt lucky to have escaped.

Paul, in the meantime, has moved with Cindy to Los Angeles, where he spent the first 18 years of his life. Armed with new jobs?Paul as vice president for Liberty National Bank and Cindy as an attorney?they do all they can to forget the past. Though Cindy struggles with the guilt of what they have done, Paul has convinced himself that his all-consuming love for Cindy justifies leaving Pamela. He continually reassures Cindy that God forgives and that He wants them to be happy. And then, as if to earn God's favor, he throws himself, as he always has, into service and good will.

Armed with her camera and pen, Pamela journals the tumultuous emotion that initially controls her days and nights. Over time, she comes to the painful realization that she sacrificed a large part of herself in pursuit of the high life she and Paul aspired to. As part of her personal and spiritual journey, Pamela eventually purchases a weekend retreat of her own on Sunset Lake and begins to reclaim the woman God intended her to be, all the while hoping and praying for Paul's heart to return to her.

Pamela finds new zest for life in her job as a photographer, especially when she is assigned to work with Chad Freeman, a Minnesota writer who specializes in regional poetry and short stories. Impressed by the caliber of her work, he invites her to partner with him in a book of poems and photos highlighting the seasonal beauty of Northern Minnesota. Such a project has been Pamela's life-long dream!

Chad's interest in Pamela is clearly not limited to business?and hungry as she is for love, she welcomes the attention he douses her with. In saner moments, Pamela questions whether or not she can or should ever involve herself in another relationship.

In Los Angeles, Cindy's depression worsens?and she requests that she and Paul separate until the divorce is final so she can get her head on straight. Paul is devastated by her seeming about-face, but agrees. Then, just when things can't get worse, he is confronted with a past he believed he had forever erased.

Believing that family background was the key to his future, the 18-year old Paul led everyone to believe his father had been an esteemed professor at UCLA who died of a heart attack while Paul was in high school. In reality, his dad was a janitor at an inner city school in LA who could barely read or write. Upon Paul's mother's death, his dad married Luanne, a waitress whom Paul always considered to be "white trash." Though he now realizes background isn't as significant as he one believed, he is relieved to learn Luanne is no longer around to contradict his story at this late date.

When a photo of Paul and Cindy appear in the business section of the paper, however, Luanne comes out of the woodwork. Unbeknownst to Paul, she kept tabs on him and was aware of his marriage and the history he invented, but not of his pending divorce. She threatens to expose Paul as a liar, labeling him a "cheat, no different than your lousy father" who a left her for another woman after 15 years of marriage.

Paul makes numerous attempts to assuage her, but an irrational Luanne warns him that she has just mailed a letter to Pamela, telling the whole story, believing that by ruining Paul, she can avenge his father's betrayal. Though such subterfuge embarrasses him, Paul makes a trip home under false pretenses to purloin the letter before Pamela reads it and broadcasts it to anyone else.

Pamela, who has just learned from Angie that Paul and Cindy are no longer together, assumes that Paul is coming home to reconcile. All hope is dashed when she realizes the "purpose" of his trip is to finalize the financial issues regarding their divorce and to gather advice on how he should handle his relationship with Angie..

When it becomes clear God will not answer her prayers, Pamela questions the faithfulness of a God who seems to act contrary to His Word. She gets even more frustrated when Starla falls in love and inevitably begins to forge a life that, at first, seems to leave Pamela behind. Even Angie, distanced as she is from home, yearns to move on and work toward forgiving her dad and accepting, if not approving, his choices.

Chad is thrilled with the pictures Pamela has taken thus far for their book?and continues to encourage her both professionally and personally. She can't deny her attraction to him, but her unresolved marital status holds her back from allowing anything to come of their flirting.

At her cabin on Sunset Lake, Pamela develops a friendship her neighbor?Ken Taylor, a slightly off-beat musician who whose own scarred past has made him somewhat of a recluse. As differently as they have lived their lives?Pamela and

Ken have much in common, including their faith in the Lord. Over time, Ken's time-worn wisdom becomes yet another instrument of healing in Pamela's life?another way God touches her life with joy.

With little else to cling to, Paul, who had always been a neglectful father, is burdened to make amends with his daughter. He flies to Chicago to visit her at school. Through the entire ordeal, Angie has felt so much in the middle?sympathizing with her mom's anger but also desirous to build a better relationship with her dad. In his hotel room, the night before he is to see his daughter again, Paul has a heart attack.

Angie arrives at the hospital just as her dad takes his last breath. She calls Pamela, who flies to Chicago immediately. Pamela's grief is laced with confusion and unresolved bitterness. God has blessed Pamela despite the pain of her husband's rejection, but how can He ever expect her to ever forgive and forget Paul's betrayal?

Cindy discovers the purloined letter from Luanne in Paul's files and after reading it, sends it to Pamela. Separately, though angered by the deception, both women begin to understand elements of Paul's personality they never did before and wonder why he was driven to such lengths to hide such simple truth.

Pamela finishes the last of her photographs for Chad, and as spring returns, she begins to spend more and more time up north, freelancing for the magazine now instead of working full time. Her friendship with Ken grows deeper?connected as they are at the soul. And though love is there, neither is in a rush to usher in something more serious than what they already have.

Pamela is burdened with her big, empty home in Minneapolis, and Ken suggests she sell, quit her job at the magazine, and move to Sunset Lake permanently. But she balks at the idea of moving "back home." Paul's will is left intact since their divorce was never finalized?so financially, Pamela is sound. Nonetheless, she struggles with the idea of completely giving up her job.

Chad tells Pamela her photography is good enough to make a go of it on her own. His encouragement is what she needs to make the decision to move north. As they talk, it becomes clear to Pamela that despite the chemistry between them, Chad is not a man who could ever be content with the simple life she has rediscovered.

As the novel draws to a close, Pamela comes face to face with her need to forgive when Angie shares a letter she received from Cindy apologizing for all that happened and detailing the tumultuous life she lived with Paul. Though Paul's heart was clearly never softened toward the pain he caused their family, Cindy's own repentance and regret is clearly evident?as is her intent to soon ask Pamela for forgiveness.

Pamela knows that it is only the beginning, but armed with a renewed understanding of the miracles God can work in human lives, she is determined to move forward and embrace the future with a heart open to all He has in mind.

© Copyright 2003 by Dawn Ringling. Reprinted with permission by Multnomah. All rights reserved.

Discussion Guide

1. Read through all of Matthew 5. In this passage, commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explores six

topics. It is clear that Jesus has something more in mind than just following the rules; He desires a heart that yearns completely after Him. It is also interesting to note the many figures of speech and graphic images He uses to get His points across. Jesus' sayings on divorce follow his statements on lust and on anger. Should we take His discourse on divorce more seriously than we do the others? What light do these other passages shed upon how we should interpret and follow the divorce passage? Did Jesus forbid divorce under all circumstances?

2. Did Pamela do all she could to save her marriage?

3. Cindy's struggles are understated, but they raise some good questions, especially in light of what was finally revealed about the emotional abuse of her first marriage. Read through the story of the woman caught in adultery found in John 7:53-8:11. Do you see any parallels between Cindy and this woman? What would Jesus have to say to Cindy? Jesus' final words to the woman in John were, "Then neither do I condemn you; go now and leave your life of sin." What about Cindy? Did she leave her life of sin when she cut off the adultery even though she was still in contact with Paul? Some people would say that remarriage in her case would be ongoing sin. What is your view of this?

4. Angie's position is a hard one. She loves both of her parents, and despite the past, desires a renewed relationship with her dad and can even do so with Cindy in the picture. If you were Angie, how would you have handled the situation?

5. Jumping in Sunset leaves the reader wondering whether or not Paul and Cindy, both believers struggling through the process of repentance, will get married. Assuming they eventually marry, how would you (knowing them as you do) respond to them if they were to become a part of your church? Would they be shunned or welcomed? What would Jesus do?

6. What if Pamela remarries? Would there be a difference in the way you would respond to her?

7. From the very beginning, Paul was committed to the institution of marriage, even though he never felt love or attraction for Pamela. He "needed" a wife to complete his world. Once he met Cindy, he realized there was such a thing as romantic love. Should he have stayed with Pamela out of commitment to her and the history they had together? Do you think counseling would have helped teach Paul to love Pamela?

Author Bio

Dawn Ringling graduated from Biola University in 1985 with a degree in communications/creative writing. She was born a writer, in fact, she barely knew her ABCs when she scribbled her first stories and poems on the back of church bulletins, grocery lists, and any other scratch paper she could find! Until 1990, she was manager of publications for Biola, where she helped to develop a fledging advertising department into an award-winning producer of college promotional and alumni materials. A mother of three and full-time writer, Dawn lives in Minnesota where, in her free time, she and her family spend summers at their lake cabin and winters skiing and skating and truly embracing the beauty of the Midwest.

Jumping in Sunset

by Dawn Ringley

Publication Date: November 6, 2003
Genres: Christian, Fiction
Paperback: 432 pages
Publisher: Multnomah Books
ISBN-10: 1590522273
ISBN-13: 9781590522271