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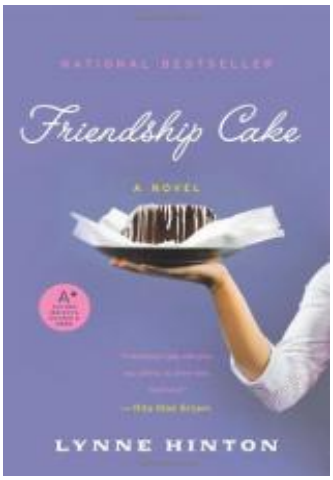
Friendship Cake

by Lynne Hinton



About the Book

Good humor, tender moments, and life lessons abound in this heartwarming portrait of small-town Southern life that is anything but simple and quiet. Five churchgoing women from Hope Springs, North Carolina, animate this humorous, poignant tale of coming to terms with one's weaknesses, honoring the fragility of life, loving passionately, laughing through tears, and thinking with the heart.

The cast of colorful characters includes:
Charlotte Stewart -- a freshman pastor, who experiences a crisis of faith.
Margaret Peele -- a no-nonsense widower who is the town confidante.
Louise Fisher -- known for her sharp-tongue, she has loved another woman for over forty years and finally gets to show it by caring for her in the last stages of Alzheimer's.
Roxie -- the woman loved by Louise, and suffering from Alzheimer's.
Jessie Jenkins -- the only African American in an all-white church.
Beatrice Newgarden -- the town busybody, who turns out to be the most solid friend to them all.

Discussion Guide

1. Margaret says that, "a heart can hold sadness a lot longer than it can anger," and that "sadness always outlasts the anger." Do you find this to be true? Is sadness a more durable emotion than anger?

2. Louise confirms that she is comfortable with death. She says that she thinks that, "death is an appropriate answer to the equation of life;" and that she "can sit in a room, watch as death approaches, gently take the hand of the dying person and lift them in its arms." Have you ever been with a person who has died? How would you describe this experience?

3. Beatrice, unlike Louise, fights against the arrival of death. If you were faced with a terminal illness who would you

prefer to be with you, Louise or Beatrice? Why?

4. Jessie says that white women and black women have different traditions when it comes to cooking. Do you believe this to be true? If so, is this because of economically based differences or culturally based differences?

5. If you are a part of a community of faith, is it integrated? Do you think that worship should be integrated or remain segregated?

6. Rev. Charlotte Stewart, writes about how she likes to imagine God as a cloud, a pillar of fire, as manna from heaven. What images of God do you find comforting?

7. Do you think it was appropriate that Roxie should move to North Carolina and be cared for by Louise or do you think the "family" should have provided the care for her? Who if you had to and were able to, would you choose to care for you if you became sick?

8. Margaret claims that being a wise and trusted friend was better than being someone's mother. Do you believe it is possible for a woman to be fulfilled without having children?

9. Charlotte is distraught after Brittany's death and she asks her mother why God doesn't hear her prayers. Have you ever felt like God doesn't hear your prayers? Does her mother's response to this question help you at all in your own faith struggle?

10. The men from the church coming to help clean off the sidewalks for the wedding was for the young pastor, "the picture of grace, undeniable, indescribable grace." Name an event when you have seen evidence of grace.

11. Grace usually has to do with pardon, mercy, providing a gift of unmerited favor. Out of the five principal women in this story who do you think demonstrated the most grace? Why?

12. What are the ingredients you would like to include in your friendship cake?

13. What makes a good friend? Who is you best friend? Why?

For Further Discussion

Scripture says: "And she said, 'See your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.' But Ruth said, 'Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God; where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you.' And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more." [Ruth 1:15-18]

Used frequently in wedding services, most people assume that this passage is between two lovers. But it actually comes from a story between in-laws. Naomi was Ruth's mother-in-law. When Ruth's husband died, Naomi encouraged Ruth to go back to live with her people; but Ruth loved Naomi. They were more than just mother and daughter-in-law, they were friends; and Ruth chose not to leave Naomi, her friend.

In **Friendship Cake**, in the Corn Relish chapter, Margaret discovers that Louise is caring for Roxie by herself, Margaret goes to see her friend to find out what is going on and she learns about Louise's secret love. After hearing how Louise feels, Margaret commits herself to helping Louise care for Roxie and commits herself to love Roxie as Louise loves her.

Topics for Further Discussion

1. How are the commitments of Ruth from the Bible and Margaret from **Friendship Cake** similar? How are they different?

2. How important is the element of loyalty to a friendship?

3. When have you experienced a friend's loyalty? When have you expected to have a friend be there for you and then have them leave or not show up? How did that experience affect you and the relationship?

4. Would you consider yourself a loyal friend?

Author Bio

Lynne Hinton is the *New York Times* bestselling author of FRIENDSHIP CAKE and PIE TOWN. She received an undergraduate degree from UNC Greensboro and a Masters of Divinity from Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley. She has served as a hospice chaplain and church pastor. Lynne is a regular columnist with The Charlotte Observer. She lives with her husband in Albuquerque, NM. Visit her website at www.lynnehinton.com.

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