



LEADER'S GUIDE

MEET ME IN THE MARGINS BY MELISSA FERGUSON



"The written word became my passion. And from that moment on all I knew was what an incredible honor it would be to bring that adventure, that life, that joy, that hope, that world to somebody else."

SAVANNAH CADE

THEMES

Rejection

Comparison

Romance

Overachieving

Family

Fear of Failure

CHARACTERS

Savannah Cade, aspiring author, and book editor for a small publishing company, Pennington Publishing, struggles with the fear of rejection and comparison issues towards her 'perfect' sister. She has never quite fit in with her overachieving family. Although she strives to people-please and keep up appearances with her multitasking and overbearing family, her heart longs to be seen for her true self – flaws and all – and to be loved for who she is, not what she does.

William Pennington, the new publisher, big shot from New York City and son of the CEO, has recently arrived at the small office of Pennington Publishing. He is on a mission to save his mother's beloved company, and within the first few weeks, he both terrifies and fires multiple staff members. But as Savannah learns, Will has a playful side outside of work and a passion for the same literature that she loves. As Will initiates some significant change within the company, he begins to open up and rid himself of his icy façade.

Olivia Cade, Savannah's 'perfect' sister, is a fitness junkie, entrepreneur, and multitasking golden girl. Although she shines bright, her habits are toxic, she projects unreasonable expectations all around her, and her pride is insufferable.

Ferris, who is now Olivia's fiancé, also dated Savannah for eight years prior. Although he comes across as caring, he is an incredibly selfish and self-centred person whose desires flip-flop based on convenience and personal needs.

Lyla is Savannah's best friend, office colleague, and ambitious country music star. She often lets her temper flare but loves Savannah and always has her best interest at heart.

STORYLINE

Savannah Cade dreams of becoming a romance author. Her passion for the written word and love of books mingles with her career as she works as an editor for Pennington Publishing Company. This company prides itself on publishing only the best literature, and it does not include romance. During an important staff meeting where the new editor (who also happens to be the CEO's son), William Pennington is being introduced to the staff, Savannah is making the final touches on her manuscript. Busily trying to edit and meet her deadline of sending her story to big-shot editor Claire Donovan, she clumsily drops her entire manuscript. As she rushes around desperately trying to collect the pages, Will hands her the title page, and her stomach sinks as she realises it's a dead giveaway of the genre. Savannah, terrified of losing her job, immediately stashes her manuscript in her secret ARC room, a hidden room upstairs connected to the office's book storage ARC room.

As she returns to her hidden room later that evening to collect her manuscript, she realises a mystery editor has written notes along the margins, correcting, offending and improving her story. Being prideful, she does not accept the help and submits her manuscript as is to Claire and is devastated when it gets rejected. There is hope, as Claire gives her two months to overhaul the story and resubmit her work, but Savannah knows it'll be a long shot. Acknowledging she needs help, she begins to make the suggested edits from her mystery editor. Over time, she falls in love with him as they banter back and forth, sharing stories of their lives and a passion for literature.

Savannah continues improving her story while managing her editing job and developing a friendship with Will. Despite her manuscript being rejected again by Claire, Will announces that Pennington Publishing intends to expand their company and will publish modern fiction, with the first romance novel being Savannah's story. Overwhelmed with joy and the realisation that Will was her mystery editor, they celebrate with a very romantic kiss!



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. Who was your favourite character from 'Meet Me in the Margins'? Why?

TALKING POINTS

These are some reasons we may feel connected or drawn to a particular character;

- We may feel empathy or sympathy for their circumstances.
- We may share similar character traits or personalities.
- We may share similar desires, hopes, or dreams.
- We may have made similar mistakes or poor decisions in our own lives.
- We may like or dislike particular characters because of our experiences with others.

2

Q. Savannah describes her editorial job as a position of power and influence. Is there an area of your life where you have influence? How do you ensure that you use this influence well?

TALKING POINTS

We are ALL in a position of influence in some way, whether over a friend, child, spouse, colleagues, Bible group or church. One way we can ensure we lead well and influence others positively is to follow Jesus' example of servant leadership;

- We can start with prayer. There is nothing more worthwhile to do for another than pray sincerely.
- We should enter these relationships, not with the desire to TAKE but to GIVE.
- We can ask ourselves, 'Do the people I lead (influence) become better?' (more like Christ, well within themselves, more competent at their jobs or capable of leading others?) *We are not responsible for someone else's sanctification; however, where we find good leadership and healthy influence, these things are often present too.
- We can acknowledge that our choices and actions influence others for the better or worse. We will be held accountable to God for these things.
- We should always be honest and quick to admit a mistake, taking responsibility for our actions.

3

Q. Savannah describes her secret room as "magic" (p27). Do you have a special place you like to retreat? Describe the magic you feel there.

TALKING POINTS

Answers may include a space in our homes, church, workplace/schools, or even in nature. The 'magic' may be the sunshine that pours through the window, the rainbow in the waterfall and the mist on your face, the sound of the rain as it patters on the roof, the cozy chair, the secret of knowing it's yours alone.

4

Q. Savannah and Giselle's relationship is toxic, and Savannah comments, "despite the fact that we are adults, she still hasn't forgiven me" (p34). Why is holding onto unforgiveness so damaging to our souls?

TALKING POINTS

Our hearts are like delicate gardens which require tending. As Christians, we should allow the Holy Spirit to clean and correct our hearts, reveal sin, and assist us in beginning the weeding process – ultimately nurturing gardens with good fruit in bloom for all to see.

When we quench the Spirit or nurture the weeds in our hearts (such as anger, envy or bitterness), the roots of these weeds grow deep, and we produce rotten fruit. The weeds begin to spread, suffocating whatever good fruit is left, and we no longer live fruitful lives.

How can we weed our hearts well?

- We remember that the Lord has forgiven us greatly and that we should forgive others; we can extend grace and love to those who have sinned against us.
- We can remove ourselves from toxic situations where sin is allowed to thrive (such as gossipy friendship groups).
- We can acknowledge our sin and pray for the will/desire to rid ourselves of it instead of nurturing it.
- We can be brave and accept help from an accountability partner where necessary.
- We can be kind to ourselves; deep hurts, betrayal, abuse, and trauma take time to heal and often, forgiveness is a lifelong daily decision.
- Even when we are struggling to forgive and let go of anger, revenge, or hate, we can actively make the daily decision to work with the Spirit to take baby steps towards the restoration of our souls.
- We can remind ourselves God is a Holy God who will seek justice for us – we need not seek it out ourselves.
- We can seek professional support when needed.

5

Q. The Cade family's three words to live by are; Generosity, Persistence, and Family (p67). Although this may seem good, the family have neglected to love one another. Discuss.

TALKING POINTS

On page 216, Will says, "You may be loyal, but it doesn't sound as if the rest of your family is loyal to you";

- The Cade family care more about appearances, influence, worldly success and efficiency than one another.
- Although she is quite a good multitasker, Savannah doesn't meet her family's ridiculous expectations and therefore feels undervalued, unappreciated and unloved.
- When Ferris dumps Savannah after an eight-year relationship and immediately begins dating her sister Olivia, her family act selfishly. Instead of loving Savannah and allowing her to grieve, they immediately move on, expecting Savannah to put on a brave face and ignore the hurt and betrayal because family comes "first".

6

Q. Savannah is a lover of words and often learns big words to impress others and expand her vocabulary. Do you regularly try and expand your vocabulary? What's the most interesting word you've learnt lately?

TALKING POINTS

Some of the fun words from the novel are;

- Sesquipedalianism; tending to use very long words.
- Farcical; relating to or resembling farce, primarily because of absurd or ridiculous aspects.
- Soirée; an evening party or gathering, typically in a private house, for conversation or music.
- Bailiwick; one's sphere of operations or area of interest.

7

Q. On page 259, Savannah asks Olivia if she is happy living under the constant pressure she has put on herself. Can you relate to Olivia's multitasking, over-achieving personality? Why is it important to remember that this behaviour can't fulfil us?

TALKING POINTS

We cannot do everything well all at once for an extended period. Sooner or later, exhaustion, frustration, unmet expectations, or life, in general, will overwhelm us to a point where we realise we are unhappy and unfulfilled;

- Worldly success costs us our energy, time, happiness, and relationships. In our attempts to succeed, we often forfeit the peace and joy that comes from serving the Lord and doing what is successful in His sight.
- Olivia's life was all about her; the Christian life is all about others and becoming less of ourselves and more like Christ.
- We each have our limits and giftings. It's essential to work within our capacity and use our gifts well – instead of looking towards others, where jealousy and resentment can grow.
- Although the whole family saw Olivia as the 'perfect' one, Olivia needed to learn from Savannah how to live, breathe, reset, and focus on living well instead of achieving and striving.
- Our fulfilment can only come from Christ.

8

Q. Savannah struggles with a deep fear of failure. How can we manage unmet hopes and disappointment, which are bound to happen at some stage in our lives?

TALKING POINTS

Every person alive will experience failure at some stage;

- If we remember that God sees the whole picture and will use our "failures" for our good, it can give us hope.
- What we see as failure might be God's plan unfolding in unexpected ways, and when we look back, we will realise God's plan was far better for us than our own.
- Even if we don't understand what God is doing, we can trust that His intentions toward us are good because He is a Holy God.
- When we fail, we can share our burdens with our sisters in Christ, seeking comfort and prayer as a balm for our tender, hurting hearts.
- We can ask the Lord to protect us from envy and bitterness. When we fail (or don't get what we want), we often notice others who have it. When we become envious - begrudging what another has instead of rejoicing for them - we are coveting what the Lord has done in their lives. The Bible says that envy is a form of hate, so ultimately, when experiencing this heart posture, we're 'hating' our sister and living in unbelief as we question God's goodness towards us. (A fantastic book to help those struggling with the sin of envy is "Seeing Green" by Tilly Delahay).

9

Q. It can be tough to receive feedback, and Savannah admits she can be "easily wounded" (p175). How can we protect our hearts from offence?

TALKING POINTS

Receiving feedback is a part of growing, maturing in Christ, and sanctification. The feedback might come from a spouse, child, friend, boss, pastor, or colleague. It is often uncomfortable, and initially, we can be defensive or hurt, but we must remember it is often for our benefit and usually comes from a place of good intent;

- The Bible says, "faithful are the wounds of a friend". As good friends, we offer feedback out of love. This is especially true if we see a loved one sinning – we are actually despising them if we leave them in their sin. There is a right and wrong way to address sin, but even when done in the right way, we cannot always expect our friend to receive the feedback graciously. We are not accountable for their response or offence, but we can ensure we pray and prepare properly to have a life-giving conversation. When things don't go as we'd hoped, we can ask the Lord to intervene and help us restore what's been damaged.
- If a friend approaches us to provide feedback or address sin, we should be slow to speak and hear them out. We don't need to respond immediately and can take our feelings, offence and hurts to the Lord, asking for clarification. Are our friends right? Should we thank them for pointing this out? Are they misled? If we are hurt, we can choose to believe that they intended to serve, help and bless us. If they were wrong, we can lovingly, in the right way, correct them.
- We all make mistakes, and sometimes the feedback we will receive is about how we've behaved towards a friend. We're not perfect; we can ask for forgiveness and move forward.

10

Q. What did you enjoy most about Savannah and Will's blossoming romance?

TALKING POINTS

There was so much to love about this book and how the sweet romance developed; it may have been the tension of figuring out who the mystery editor was or seeing the physical friendship between Will and Savannah develop.



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