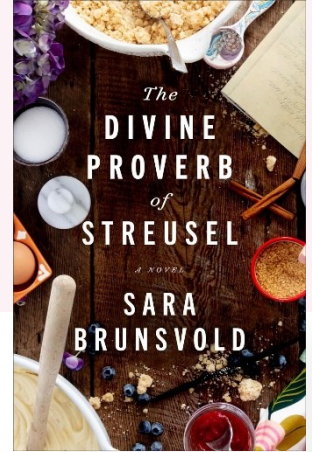




LEADER'S GUIDE

THE DIVINE PROVERB OF STREUSEL BY SARA BRUNSVOLD



"A talented baker employs the pantry ingredients; a wise woman adds a divine one. With every crumb she shakes from her palm, she pours a prayer from her lips... She sows seeds of love onto hate, mercy onto hurt, hope onto gloom, giving freely of the faith she possesses."

LENA BAUMANN

THEMES

Remembrance

Mentoring

Family Relationships

Faith

Fear

Regret

Ancestry

Forgiveness

Healing

Homemaking

HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Infidelity

Father Hurt

Death

CHARACTERS

Nikki Ann Werner is a lover of stories by trade (a literature teacher) and passion (a book lover). After the shocking news of her father's re-marriage only months after the divorce, her whole world has crumbled and everything she thought was solid and trustworthy now feels unsafe. Nikki knows in her head that she can't remain bitter, yet her heavy and broken heart demands to be heard, and she deeply desires all wrongs to be made right. Nikki tends to flee from hard things (just like her father and uncle) and when she allows her fear to guide her, she almost undoes the good things she's worked so hard to accomplish. Nikki unexpectedly finds a reprieve from her pain, the peace she has craved, and the listening ear she needs at her father's family farm, and as she soaks in the wisdom from those who have gone before her, she finds the hope required of her to do the next thing.

Wesley James Werner (affectionately nicknamed 'Fritz' by Aunt Emma) is Nikki's estranged uncle. After years of service, war trauma, and running from his family's farm in Eddner, his broken heart finds refuge, faith and wholeness by coming back home. As a child, Wes was always a rule follower, and despite his father's harsh physical punishments and lack of affection, he decidedly chooses to remember the good hidden

underneath it all. Now a bachelor and living alone on the farm, his tarrying and fearful heart is full of secret angst as he repeatedly tries to shove away his feelings for childhood friend Joyce. While Wes is a steadfast, kind, and wise man, he needs a good dose of his own advice so that he might reject the fear that hinders him, and step toward the bright future God has ordained for him.

Granma Ann is Chris and Wes' mother (Nikki's grandmother and Aunt Emma's sister). She was practical like her father Otto, and the epitome of a gracious host like her mother Lena – living and breathing homemaking and hospitality, and prided herself on creating a sanctuary abode for anyone who came through her home. While Ann's husband Henry was a stern, sombre and harsh man, Ann's relentless prayers for peace and light made the Eddner farmhouse a home. The perpetual smile she kept hidden in the corner of her mouth, the jokes she loved to collect, and her way of hearing another's heart, made her incredibly loved and influential among the women in the small town. Appropriately, Ann's favourite Bible story was the prodigal son and the three things her fierce loyalty held sacred were the Church, Family and Home.

Aunt Emma is Ann's sister and Nikki's great Aunt. The joy of the Lord is Emma's strength and breath in her lungs, and her faith is a guidepost for her life. Emma loves to tell stories and offer wise counsel to those the Lord directs her way. Emma is a good influence on those around her, particularly her nephew Chris, and acts as a bridge between the generations. Emma enjoys a laugh and has a quirky sense of humour.

Chris Werner is Ann's prodigal son who has strayed from his family's faith and seeks love and acceptance in wrong and unfulfilling places. He has chosen to abandon his wife, Lydia, and children, Nikki and Hannah, for the pursuit of his own happiness with another woman. While Chris' childhood trauma has impacted his decision-making, his immaturity and distance from the Lord prevent him from acknowledging his mistakes and understanding the deep hurt that he is responsible for. While we do not know if Chris will repent from his sin and return to Christ, the novel does end with the beginnings of a restored father-daughter relationship and a commitment from Nikki to show him Jesus, despite his seemingly unforgivable choices.

Isaac Chao Sarn is Nikki's loyal, steady, and faithful boyfriend who intends to propose to her and solidify their future together. After Nikki's father abandons her mother and re-marries, Nikki's feelings of rejection creep into her and Isaac's relationship, and throughout the novel, Isaac gives Nikki space to figure out whether she wants a future with him or not. Isaac is a reliable man who takes time to consider his future through prayer and the wisdom of trustworthy people who surround him. He is quick to forgive and is not too prideful to admit wrongdoing and ask for forgiveness.

Joyce Kindstrom is a childhood friend of Chris and Wes', and grew up being taught the ways of faith and homemaking by Granma Ann while her single mum worked. Having been truly seen and heard by Granma Ann, and embodying that legacy, Joyce is a tender-hearted angelic beauty (both inside and out) with a perpetual twinkle in her eyes and a gift for hospitality. Never having married, Joyce has been patiently waiting for the love of her life, Wes, to overcome his fear and declare his deep affection towards her.

Lena and Otto Baumann are Nikki's great-grandparents. Lena is the author of the German-English proverbial cookbook, which she created for her daughter Ann as a gift on her confirmation day in the Lutheran Church as a thirteen-year-old girl. Otto had a practical and observant mind and carefully conserved what they had for the sake of his children's future.

Hannah and Lydia are Nikki's sister and mother, who, despite being heartbroken and abandoned by Chris, still pray for Nikki's hardened heart towards him, and live in the hope of a bright future in Christ.

Tracy Brown is a mentor, colleague, and friend of Nikki's, who intentionally pours into her life during their 'gab and grace' chat sessions.

STORYLINE

At twenty six Nikki thought all of her dreams had fallen into place with her great job and committed boyfriend, but her world shatters when her father unexpectedly abandons her family. Reeling with anger and hurt, Nikki can't help but project her dad's betrayal and failed marriage onto her relationship with her boyfriend Isaac, and during what should be a serious conversation about their future, she runs, as fast and as far as she can go.

Desperately seeking peace and comfort, Nikki finds herself at her estranged uncle Wes' farm – the farm her father grew up on – only to find that this refuge could be the place where her hurting heart finds rest and healing. Nikki discovers that it's her own family story, her ancestry, and the memories surrounding her father's family home - the Eddner farmhouse - that will transform and renew her. By exploring her culinary roots through a hand-written proverbial cookbook discovered in a storage box, the farmhouse becomes her sanctuary during a crucial point in her life where she could either give in to fear and bitterness or choose to forgive and trust God. As she learns more about the women who came before her, she also finds herself, discovering a German heritage rich with faith, wisdom, and a particular fondness for potatoes!

This is a journey of self-discovery, forgiveness and the power of remembrance. "Nikki realizes how delicious streusel with a healthy dollop of faith can serve as a guide to heal wounds of the past" (blurb).



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. What did you most enjoy while reading *The Divine Proverb of Streusel*?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include:

- The German proverbial cookbook recipes and wisdom.
- The transformation of the characters or the characters themselves.
- The redemption of relationships and poor choices.
- The romance between Wes and Joyce.
- The uniqueness of the storyline.
- The honest dive into grief, suffering and trauma responses.

2

Q. "Nikki scattered the toppings upon the dough. Each crumble fell into place accompanied by prayer, as the divine proverb of streusel had enjoined" (p194). Nikki discovers that wise women add the divine element of prayer to all that they do. Discuss her journey and the encouraging role faithful women played in her growth.

TALKING POINTS

Nikki flourished by looking to the past and learning from the women who had gone before her, as well as seeking comfort and friendship from women in her present:

- Tracy's "gab and grace" sessions encouraged Nikki to seek wise counsel and pray through situations.

- Joyce was a gentle friend who encouraged and prayed for Nikki.
- Aunt Emma, through emails, helped Nikki discover the truth and answers to tough questions. Emma didn't usually tell Nikki what she would want to hear but gave solid Christian advice on forgiveness and repentance.
- The cherished memory of Aunt Ann was a key factor that drew Nikki towards Eddner, her place of rest, healing and redemption.
- Great-grandmother Lena wrote the proverbial German cookbook, providing Nikki with wise words and truth that transcends time, space and culture.
- Hannah provides Nikki with helpful advice on love and marriage.

3

Q. "Three things withstood the pressures of time and assimilation: faith in One True God, hope for better things, and love of butter" (p34). Lena, Ann and Nikki occupied very different times and encountered different challenges, but for each of them, the kitchen was a place of refuge. What might it feel like to envision our homes as a place to invite peace and a sacred space of worship and hospitality?

TALKING POINTS

"No matter how small, how lacking in finery, how old or new, our homes are gifts to be shared generously, opened to friends and foes and foreigners without partiality. How incredible to think that the space between our four walls can be where others set down their burdens and rest, if only for a meal. We can cheer and comfort the empty so they leave filled, soul and body" (94).

Hospitality can feel scary or unmanageable for many reasons:

- "What if they say no?"
- "My house is too small"
- "Hospitality requires too much work."

Many common fears can be alleviated by remembering our goal is to serve others, not to impress or entertain.

4

Q. How does Nikki's understanding of the link between love and trust grow throughout the story?

TALKING POINTS

Everything Nikki thought she knew about love and trust was broken when her dad had an affair, divorced her mother and remarried soon after. Nikki struggled with commitment to Isaac, and out of fear, projected her parents failed relationships onto her own. Nikki was afraid that Isaac's love might be a snare (p44), or that love isn't always enough (p74). Through engaging with faithful friends, the cookbook and her Bible, Nikki learnt that:

- Love is trusting that the person you're with can be trusted with your heart; they see the worst and ugliest pieces of us and still choose us (p21).
- Love is heard in actions (p162).
- Women and men receive love differently (p163).
- That with Jesus, it is possible to love the unloveable (p179).
- We love because He first loved us.

5

Q. Nikki asks Tracy, "Do you think we should look at people in light of their actions or in light of what they have suffered? (p152). What do you think?"

TALKING POINTS

Some ideas from Tracy and Nikki's conversation:

- "Suffering can beget action."
- "We all have subconscious or conscious ways we interact with what's around us, informed by what's happened to us."
- Perhaps a person is responsible for their own actions (and can no longer blame their behaviour on their suffering), once they understand the connections or the Holy Spirit reveals it to them.

6

Q. Father-hurt is an important theme in the story. Nikki needed someone fighting for her and God provided Uncle Wes, but deep down, Nikki truly wanted her dad. Discuss the ways Wes helped Nikki and Chris reconnect.

TALKING POINTS

Wes' motto was to "Be the help". He relied heavily on Bible reading, prayer and advice from Aunt Emma to help those in need.

Wes helped Chris to form a connection with Nikki again through stories of his past, and showing an interest in her as a person – not merely trying to explain away his poor behaviour (which did not have the desired effect).

Not only did Wes welcome his estranged niece into his home, but he encouraged her to connect with her roots, to embrace fellowship and to view her father's efforts in light of her sin and God's forgiveness towards her. He encouraged her to show her dad Christ, despite all the hurt and heartache, because true healing can only come after forgiveness.

7

Q. "What is the hardest thing you ever had to forgive?" (p173).

TALKING POINTS

Nikki asks Aunt Emma this question via email, and Emma's response is, "It's not what I forgive, it's why I choose to do it that matters most. The why is Jesus. I myself am a maligner, an abuser, an insulter, a neglecter, a shunner. Yet I am pure, covered in the love of a scourged and rejected Savior. I love because I am loved. I forgive because I am forgiven. I am a saint because he became my sin. I cannot charge a penny debt to someone else when I have had millions erased (p175).

It can be easy to forgive someone who has unknowingly offended us or has accidentally sinned against us. But it can feel like an impossible task to forgive someone who has betrayed us, especially those we love and trust the most. The good news is that what is impossible with man is possible with God.

What is true biblical forgiveness?

- Forgiveness is not accepting sin, but cancelling the debt owed by the individual who has sinned against us. This protects our hearts from resentment and bitterness and is expected of us by God, who has forgiven our great debts (Matthew 6:14).
- Forgiveness is not an emotion but a daily decision with the Lord's strength.
- Often forgiveness results in the restoration of the relationship, but not always.

- Choosing forgiveness does not mean we must put ourselves at risk and re-enter dangerous or toxic relationships with others. We can forgive someone and not re-enter relationships with them until trust is developed or repentance has occurred.

8

Q. Nikki is a lover of stories and believes that the “books someone chooses to keep tell you a lot about their character” (p40). Discuss the role various books play throughout the story. What might the books you keep reveal about you?

TALKING POINTS

The two most influential books (apart from the Bible) in Nikki’s story are the German Cookbook which helped her to reconnect with her ancestry and cultivated a passion for remembrance, peace and hospitality in her life. The second significant book was Little Women which he father gifted to her, and the act of kindness demonstrated a willingness from Chris and blossomed a hope in Nikki’s heart for restoration.

9

Q. Which divine proverb is most relevant to you right now and why?

TALKING POINTS

Divine proverb recipes include:

- Introduction; “The wise listen to those who have already learned and lived” (p34).
- Egg Hash (Hoppel Poppel); “But the work set before us is the work ordained for us by a God who sees no inequality of worth” (p45), wisdom inspired by Proverb 14:1, “Every wise woman buildeth her house”.
- German Hamburgers (Frikadellen); “Home should be where peace comes to roost” (p66), wisdom inspired by Proverb 14:30, “a sound heart is the life of the flesh”.
- Beef Sauce for Mashed Potatoes (Haschee); “Welcoming others into our home is a ministry that cannot be overrated” (p94), wisdom inspired by Proverb 11:25, “He that watereth shall be watered also himself”.
- Scalloped Cabbage (Kohl aus Eddner); “You can look at what you don’t have and yearn, or you can look at what you have and give thanks” (p107), wisdom inspired by Proverb 15:16, “Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith”.
- Potato Pancakes (Kartoffelpuffer) with Applesauce (Apfelmus); “We cannot know what is around the bend” (p122), wisdom inspired by Proverb 14:26, “In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge”.
- Basic Bread Roll (Brotchen); “Let us embrace the hard work of living and loving in this world” (p137), wisdom inspired by Proverb 16:3, “Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.”
- Mother Schoenborn’s Raisin Nut Cookies (Kekse mit Rosinen und Walnussen); “This world gives enough reasons to fret. Be not one of them. Be the help” (p167), inspired by wisdom from Proverbs 3:27, “Withhold not good... when it is in the power of thine hand to do it”.
- Crispy Egg Noodles (Spatzle); “His word is sure; he is our provision in all, big and small” (p176), wisdom inspired by Proverb 29:25 “Whosoever putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe”.
- Crumb Cake (Streuselkuchen); “A harvest is a reward of seeds wisely sown” (p191), wisdom inspired by Proverb 11:18, “To him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward”.

Q. The phrase, "Do the next thing" becomes a crucial encouragement to Nikki as she does hard things and works through her grief. Read the poem by Minnie Paull, and discuss.

TALKING POINTS

Minnie Paull, 1897;

"Fear not tomorrow, child of the King,
Trust them with Jesus, do the next thing.
Do it immediately, do it with prayer;
Do it reliantly, casting all care;
Do it with reverence, tracing His hand
Who placed it before thee with earnest
command.
Stayed on Omnipotence, safe 'neath His wing,
Leave all results, do the next thing.



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