

Reading Group Guide

1. As in previous situations, Beatrice talks her friends into taking on a project to try to take their minds off Margaret's cancer. Do you think this is an effective way to cope with a tragedy in your life? Have you ever been involved in what felt like a "diversion project"?
2. Margaret and Charlotte have a special bond, as friends and as parishioner and minister. Have you ever felt particularly close to someone who played a role in your life like that of a minister? If so, what did that relationship mean to you?
3. In a phone conversation between Margaret and Charlotte, Charlotte explains that "I feel like myself" in the Southwest. "It's like I've come to a place of perfect peace." Do you feel this is true of the place where you live now? If not, is there another place where you feel this way?
4. Charlotte works in a battered women's shelter in Gallup, New Mexico. Why do you think she left Hope Springs to take this job? How is it similar to or different from her work as a parish minister?
5. Although Charlotte is far away from Margaret, she does her best to help her sick friend. Have you ever been geographically distant from someone who needed your support? How did you handle it? What do you think a friend should do in this situation?

6. After some denial, Beatrice finally admits that she suffers from depression. Why do you think she became depressed? What were her symptoms? What do you think she should have done to get help?
7. Margaret decides that she needs to get back to Texas to find her mother's family. Why do you think this trip is important to Margaret? Do you feel that she is able to get what she wants from the trip?
8. Rachel is a teenager and Margaret is an older woman, but they still are able to find some things in common with each other. How would you characterize their relationship? What are they able to learn from each other?
9. How does Margaret think of death? What does she see as the "gift of dying"? Do you agree with this view of death? Why or why not?
10. James points out to Jessie that friends, true friends, are rare and wonderful. How do the women in this book show their friendship to one another through difficult times? Who are your true friends, and what makes them special for you?