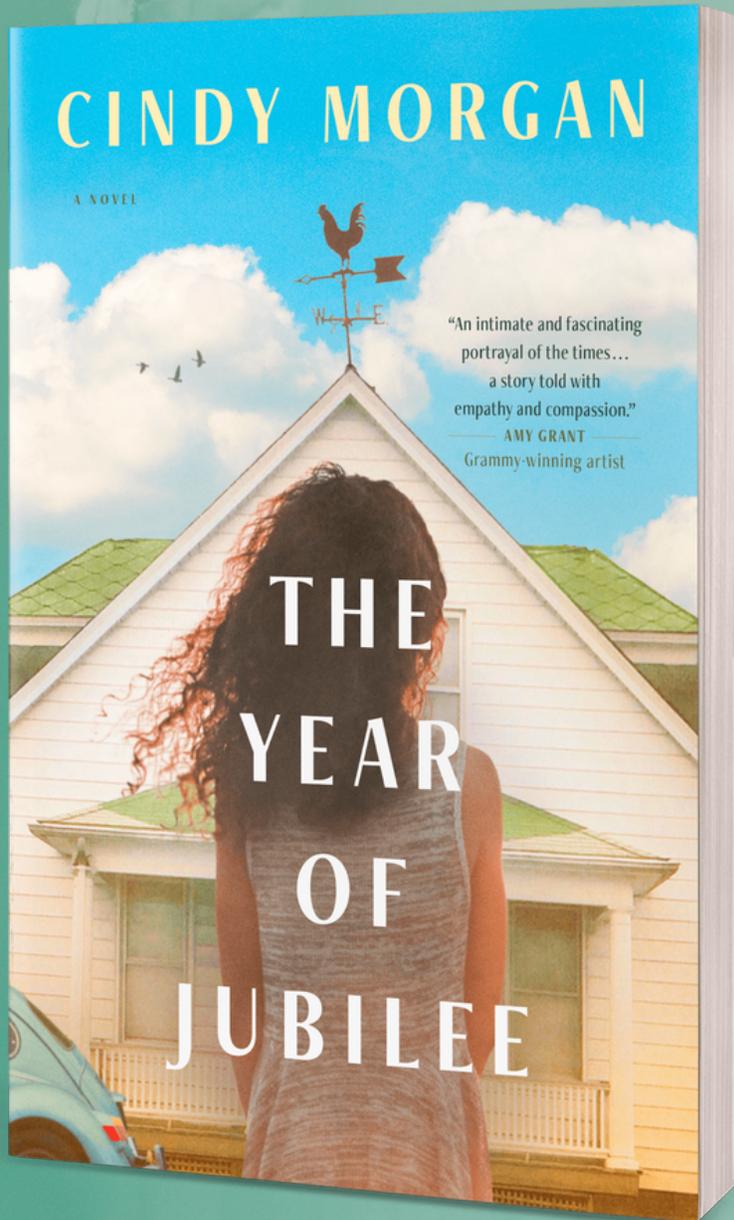


Book Club Kit



“The Year of Jubilee is a must read, especially for anyone struggling with seeing the world around them through the eyes of another!”

LYNDA RANDLE, award-winning singer-songwriter and author

About Cindy Morgan



Singer/songwriter Cindy L. Morgan is a two-time Grammy nominee, a thirteen-time Dove winner, and a recipient of the prestigious Songwriter of the Year trophy. An East Tennessee native, her evocative melodies and lyrics have mined the depths of life and love both in her own recording and through songwriting for noteworthy artists around the globe, including Vince Gill, India.Arie, Rascal Flatts, Amy Grant, Sandra McCracken, and Glen Campbell.

Cindy is the author of two works of adult nonfiction—the memoir *How Could I Ask for More: Stories of Blessings, Battles & Beauty* (Worthy Inspire, 2015) and *Barefoot on Barbed Wire: A Journey Out of Fear into Freedom* (Harvest House Publishers, 2001)—and of the children's picture book *Dance Me, Daddy* (ZonderKidz, 2009). *The Year of Jubilee* is her debut novel.

Cindy is a cocreator of the charitable Hymns for Hunger Tour, which has raised awareness and resources for hunger relief organizations across the globe. Cindy has two daughters and splits time living between a small town near Nashville and Holly Springs, North Carolina with her husband Jonathan. For more information visit cindymorganmusic.com.



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A Note from Cindy Morgan

Hey Friends-

I'm so excited for you to read "The Year of Jubilee" and take this journey as a book club.

Writing this book has been a deeply personal experience, as I have found writing always is for anyone who decides to write their deepest questions and wondering down on paper.

The time it took to write this book has taken me through many stages of life. I think the journey taught me much about my own struggles and short comings. It has also taught me about the faithfulness of God.

I hope each of you enjoy this book, and I would love to hear what you think as you dive into the story and all of the questions, and hopefully, discoveries that unfold along the way.

Happy reading!

Blessings,
Cindy





Recipes

Dutch Pancakes

One of my kids' favorite weekend breakfast treats!

- 1 Cup of Unbleached Flour
- 1 Cup of Whole Milk (or 2% or skim for a lighter version)
- 1 egg per person (3)
- 1 tsp of vanilla

Heat a cast iron or non stick skillet

Add butter or margarine and wait til it is sizzling

Pour batter into the skillet and then lift the pan up and around in a circular motion until the batter is very thin

Once the edges turn golden brown, carefully flip the pancake over until the other side is golden brown.

Add sliced strawberries, whip cream, and maple syrup.

Or a squeeze of lemon and sugar, or cinnamon, sugar, and MORE butter, or anything that sounds good:)

English Tea

Pour 8 cups of boiling water over 2 bags of English Breakfast Tea in a Tea Pot and allow to steep for 3-4 minutes

Add sugar and milk to taste

Discussion Questions

To start the book group conversation about *The Year of Jubilee*, read through these questions with your book club.

1.) The inspiration for *The Year of Jubilee* came from the author's earliest memory, in which she was held up to her brother's hospital room window, holding his pet rooster. What's the first thing you remember? How has that memory shaped you or the way you see the world?

2.) Miss Adams uses a quote from a John Steinbeck novel to encourage her students to expand their perspective and later shares *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* with Grace. What were your favorite books as a child? What books—in childhood or adulthood—changed how you see the world?

3.) Though she lacks affection from Virginia, where does Grace find mothering from others? Have you found friends, mentors, or relatives who fill relational gaps in your own life? Who are they?

4.) Remembering the message preached at her husband's funeral, Aunt June tells Grace, "When God says no it's because He wants to give us a greater yes . . . I personally think that God allows suffering because He wants to show us something beautiful." Do you agree with her perspective? How do you answer the question of why suffering exists in this world?

5.) Confronted with injustice, Miss Adams and John Mockingbird are both determined to help but take action in different ways. In what ways do they help? What attempts did you feel might be misguided?

Continued on next page



6.) Aunt June cares for Sissy and Grace through what proves to be a tumultuous summer. What did you think of how she counsels and disciplines (or doesn't discipline) the girls? What might you have done differently?

7.) In her desperation to save Isaac, Grace enlists the help of Golden Shepherd, a child evangelist and healer. What does she come to learn about Golden's gifts? Do you believe healings, such as the one Golden attempts for Isaac, are possible? How do you define what a miracle is? Do you believe miracles exist?

8.) Though Grace is deeply wounded by her mother's distance and unforgiveness, she gets glimpses into the things that have shaped Virginia, like her family of origin. What did you think of Virginia at the start of the book? Did your perspective change as the story went on? How has your view of your own parents changed as you've gotten older?

9.) Grace has spent most of her life without friends outside of her siblings but finds connection with Theo and Yully. Are there people in your life who have become friends despite differences in your backgrounds or beliefs? What are the benefits of these types of friendships? What challenges do they present?

10.) In a desperate moment, Hutch acts to save Rank Gunner despite the terror Rank intended to inflict on Hutch and his family. Would you have done the same? Are there other examples in the story of characters loving others who could be considered their enemies? How can we learn to love our enemies better?

11.) In the epilogue, Grace reveals the course life takes for many of the book's characters in the years that follow. Which characters have the future you might've expected? Which surprised you?

My discussion questions:

Jot down some questions you had about the story here.

Q&A with Cindy Morgan

What is the meaning behind the title of the book, *The Year of Jubilee*?

The idea for the title of this book evolved organically over the process of writing it. My original title was *Rojo*, but as the book evolved, it became apparent that there was a bigger theme at work. I have always loved the charm of small towns in the South. I still live in a small town in the South. There is something comforting, a sense of community that seems lost in the world, that is present when living in a small town. I love the word jubilee. It evokes a lot of energy. My mother has attended a Messianic congregation for years. She has spoken many times about the Year of Jubilee and its importance in the Jewish calendar—a time when debts are washed away and prisoners are released from their bonds. I just love the connection between the name of the town and this biblical concept, especially in light of the historical setting of the book.

Although this story is fictional, it is based on real-life themes and struggles endured by your own family. Can you tell us about that?

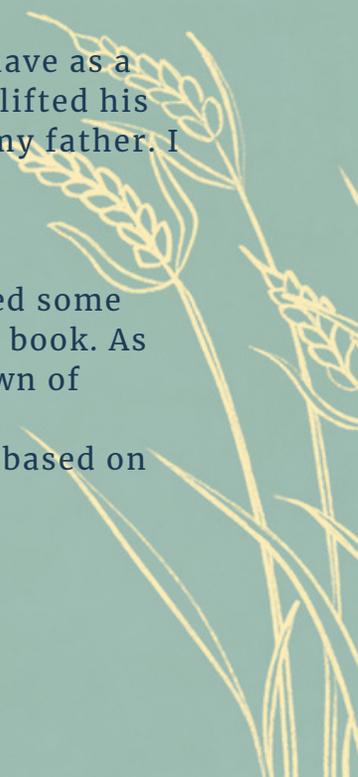
As you have said, the book is a work of fiction, but as is the case with most fiction, the inspiration from real life is always alive on the page. In addition to the prologue, which is based on my first memory as a child, the parallels between fiction and real life are struggles between mother and daughter and siblings and the reality of being poor, or just strangely different, in a small town. For my family, the aftermath of the death of a child cast a long shadow. The struggle a family endures after such a loss is a minefield. My family's struggles in the aftermath of losing Samuel are definitely present on the pages of *The Year of Jubilee*.

In your author's note, you mention that this book is based on your first memory as a child. Can you give us the real account of that?

The original inspiration for the book was the very first memory I have as a child: seeing my brother Samuel through the hospital window as I lifted his pet rooster, *Rojo*, up to the window, sitting atop the shoulders of my father. I was around three and a half years old.

What elements changed from reality to the fictional page?

The prologue is very close to the actual memory. I might have added some small details, but the prologue is the closest thing to reality in the book. As for the part that is fiction—the entire creation of the charming town of Jubilee, the historical setting, and the details of the story are all fictionalized, but there are anchor moments that are definitely based on real memories or the emotional impact of those memories.



Q&A with Cindy Morgan

You did some research on the impact of first memories. How do first memories shape a person?

Yes, I did some research about first memories. I actually did that research after writing the book. The memory I had carried with me was so compelling that I could never leave it alone. I read some studies that suggest that even things we experience pre-memory, as an infant or toddler, or even in the womb, can impact the emotional state and the outlook we have in life. Some believe our first memories can set our lives in a certain direction. Certainly other events can intervene in positive or negative ways, but the imprint we receive when we are young does make a difference.

In what ways does Grace Mockingbird's life mirror your own experience?

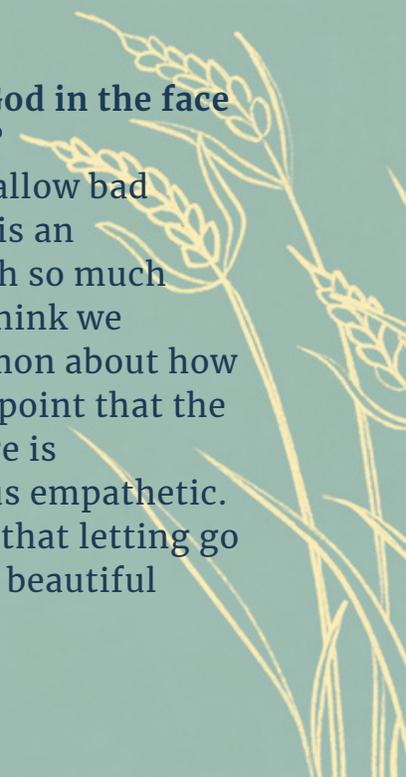
The ways in which Grace found it difficult to express herself—that's me. I think I became a writer because I found it so difficult to express myself verbally. There were a lot of very strong personalities in my family. To be introverted and shy was to most likely remain unheard. Also, I definitely relate to the part of Grace that wanted to please everyone. The strongest parts of Grace, though, were inspired by my sister Sam.

How does faith play a role in this story?

At its core, it's a story about the fear that God will not take care of us. It asks the question, why does God allow the worst things imaginable to happen? We often feel like even the idea that God could allow the worst thing to happen must mean he doesn't care for us. That is a big question that the story tries to walk through.

One of the themes explored in this book is the sovereignty of God in the face of unjust suffering. Why is this an important topic to address?

A very familiar question that people ask is how a good God can allow bad things to happen to good people. It isn't a new question, but it is an important conversation we keep having. People are dealing with so much loss, suffering, illness, death, brutality, and injustice. I don't think we should ever fear asking difficult questions. Tim Keller, in a sermon about how and why God's sovereignty allows for suffering, makes a great point that the worst people you meet are those who have never suffered. There is something about suffering that opens up our hearts. It makes us empathetic. It's difficult to understand, until you're on the other side of it, that letting go of our "control" and surrendering to the will of God brings this beautiful freedom.



Q&A with Cindy Morgan

You said most of the characters in this book surprised you. Why is that?

I think that is the mysterious thing about fiction writing. You are eased back in your chair, writing a scene, sure that you know every character who will be in that scene, and then suddenly someone new appears. It's like they open the door of your brain and just walk in. It's a strange and mysterious thing.

Who was your favorite character to develop? Why?

Aunt June was my favorite character. She is so real to me. She is probably inspired by a dozen different people I know. She just appeared on the page one day. Maybe that happened because we need someone like that character to exist in our real life.

Who was the most challenging character to develop? Why?

Oh, without a doubt, Virginia. I think at first I made Virginia too likable, then too unlikable. I suspect it was because I didn't understand her. It took time. I had to develop empathy for her and forgive her proactively for everything I knew she was going to do.

In your book you mention the idea of “the poor mind.” Can you explain what this is?

The poor mind is the idea of viewing yourself as being deserving of less in life than others. People who suffer from a poor mind often self-sabotage and intentionally keep their lives from improving. They keep their expectations low. It is a spiritual and emotional poverty that seeps into every aspect of life. In many ways, it's a sense of despair. Poverty is a brutal master. Often when people have escaped physical poverty, they still see themselves as poor. The damage and insecurity of poverty can become part of a person's DNA.



Q&A with Cindy Morgan

Although you've written two nonfiction books, this is your first novel. How has the process been different?

The process was completely different. I absolutely love writing memoirs and reflective nonfiction. I think the challenging thing about writing fiction is that you want to include a lot of the poetic language that you would use in a nonfiction piece, but wrap that into the structure of a fictional a story. Also, the entire cause-and-effect in storytelling is a rule you can't break without losing your reader. There can be no coincidences. Everything has to add up. You have to satisfy all of the foreshadowing that you set up back in act one. It is such a challenge. I love that about fiction.

What is one thing you hope readers take away from this book?

I hope it communicates that in community, we are never alone. And especially in a faith community, we can share our most difficult moments in life together and bear one another's burdens. A burden is always lighter when we don't carry it alone. I also hope that the novel might inspire people to empathize with others around them who have a different story. I love the anecdote about Fred Rogers carrying a note in his pocket for years with a quote from a social worker that said, "There isn't anyone you couldn't love once you've heard their story." I believe that, and I hope there are traces of it in the pages of *The Year of Jubilee*.

How have you seen that play out in your own life, as well as in the lives of others?

The first story that comes to mind is that when my brother Samuel was in the hospital, some pastoral people promised my mother and father that if they had enough faith, he would be healed. I think they wanted to give my parents hope, but they were very irresponsible in doling out a promise only God could make or keep. When a family is in such a vulnerable state, you cannot make these kinds of promises. I think sometimes people want a crystal ball. They also want to offer a crystal ball—some shallow, possibly even well-meaning comfort, that they won't have to be around to see all the way through. When you're afraid, someone appearing with a "word" from God seems like a comfort. But it is rarely that easy or simple. Christians, pastors, priests, and rabbis often want to tell you when the end of the world is coming, or who's going to become the next president, or what kind of biblical code they've cracked to tell you the day you're going to die. We've heard it all. We are all susceptible to the fear of the unknown.



Q&A with Cindy Morgan

Why did you choose to set the story in the South during the civil rights movement?

I have always been drawn to that time in history—nearly obsessed with it. It was a time so brimming with possibility, scandal, and bravery for such a righteous cause. The idea of jubilee seemed especially poignant from a civil rights perspective.

How does this book specifically deal with race relations?

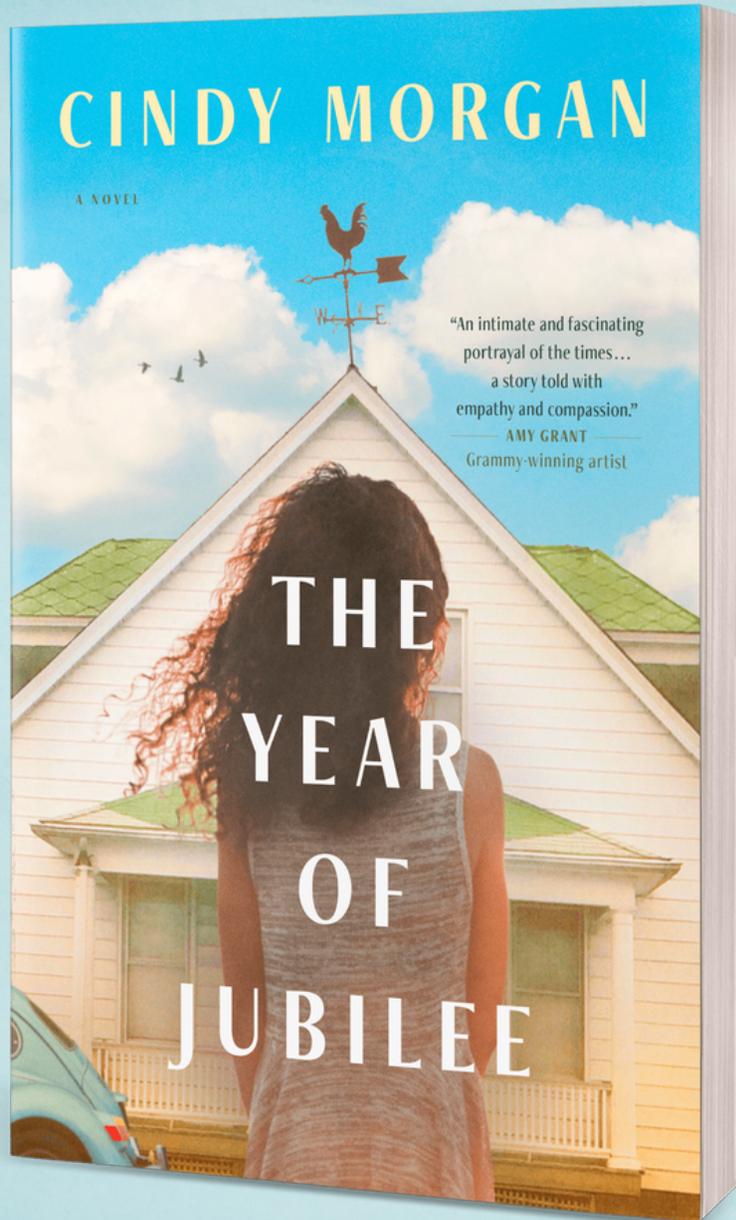
The entire segregation-versus-integration conversation was at its boiling point in 1963. Grace is trying to make the transition. She is the representation of the next generation and how they will approach the race conversation and have a different view of equality than their parents did. The idea of racial segregation is so barbaric and unthinkable. It is so sad that the South—the buckle of the Bible Belt—was in many respects the very last place to adopt integration. I wanted to walk through that and interview people close to me who could give me a true perspective on that time in history.

One of the major topics in this book is a difficult mother-daughter dynamic. Did you experience any of that same struggle as a mother with your own daughters?

Yes, for sure, no surprise there. I think the mother-daughter dynamic is intrinsically set up for drama and struggle. Though my daughters and I have a very good relationship, there were times when I was too controlling, trying to order their lives too much. We made it through and yet, I still have to remind myself to give them space and respect. My mother and I have a good relationship now, as do she and my sisters. But it didn't come without some work on both parts.



Thanks for choosing



for your book club!

**Keep an eye out for
the next novel by
Cindy Morgan**

Coming in 2025 from
Tyndale House Publishers

