

## **The School of Dying Graces**

### **Book Discussion Guide**

#### **Chapter 1: Bringer of Hope**

Have you ever had a major prayer go unanswered? Did you blame yourself—if only you would have had more faith, God would have answered, etc.? What is the truth?

Have you ever lost a loved one to terminal illness? Do any of Richard Felix's experiences or feelings in this first chapter resonate with your experience?

#### **Chapter 2: To Hold Lightly the Things of This World**

Consider what it might be like to be told you had only a few weeks to live. Can you put your thoughts into words?

Upon hearing the bad news, Vivian asked to go to the beach. Where do you think you would want to go after such a diagnosis? With whom? To do what?

Do you keep a journal? What might be some benefits of writing in a journal during times of sorrow and stress?

Vivian had resolved to do two things: to praise God in all things and to hold lightly to the things of this world. What are some ways that you could practice these attitudes in your own life?

#### **Chapter 3: When Fear First Hits**

Was there ever a time when bad news completely took you by surprise?

What do the following phrases say to you?

- Don't be afraid to be afraid.
- Let others serve you.

Can you imagine yourself giving this advice to a friend? What about taking this advice yourself—could you easily see yourself doing these things? Why or why not?

#### **Chapter 4: Praying for a Miracle**

What do you think of the belief that we should "Expect a Miracle." Do you think it sets us up for disappointment or prepares us to receive what's good? Explain.

What do you think about the power of prayer? Why did the Felixes share their burden with the student body of the college? What are the potential risks of such an action, if any?

#### **Chapter 5: To Live a Full Life**

How did continuing to plan Melissa's wedding help Vivian work through her pain?

Discuss how the gathering of the family was a healing time for the Felixes. Would you seek out your family in a time of crisis? Why or why not?

### **Chapter 6: Clinging to the Cross**

Discuss how the visit to Mission La Purísima Concepción was a comfort to Vivian and Richard. How did it illustrate the theme of resurrection to them?

Was there ever a time when you literally or figuratively clung to the Cross? If so, describe your experience.

### **Chapter 7: Beauty and the Beast**

Vivian called chemotherapy “the cure that kills” (page 58). Have you ever undergone a treatment that seemed worse than the problem it was supposed to solve?

How did the verse from Exodus 14:13-14 (page 61) help Vivian through chemotherapy? How does this illustrate the value of committing Bible verses to memory?

### **Chapter 8: A Time to Sow**

Describe how gardening brought comfort to Vivian and Richard. Have you ever planted and tended a garden?

Discuss how the concepts of sowing, reaping, pruning, and harvesting related to Vivian’s illness.

Why was the thought of working in the garden alone so fearful for Richard?

### **Chapter 9: A Costly Harvest**

Explain the significance of Vivian’s dream. What messages did she take from it?

Have you ever had a dream that brought you comfort, conviction, or prophecy?

Do you believe that God speaks to us through our dreams? Why or why not?

### **Chapter 10: After These Things**

How did the story of Abram and God’s promises concerning the Promised Land change Vivian’s perspective on her illness?

Can you recall a time in your life when reading God’s Word changed your perspective on a situation? If so, please share your memories.

### **Chapter 11: Strengthened by Love**

The trip to Lake Arrowhead was an oasis in the suffering for Vivian and Richard. What blessings did they receive there?

How did their experience with cancer color their awareness of small blessings?

### **Chapter 12: Standing Firm**

Explain how it might have been that Vivian could see “the dearest freshness deep down in things” in the face of her terrible diagnosis. What enables such peace against all hope?

### **Chapter 13: The Question of a Greater Miracle**

How did the story of the paralytic in John 5 speak to Vivian?

How did Vivian’s speaking experience and friendship with Gordon Coulter enrich them both?

What was the significance of Pandora’s box to Vivian’s situation?

### **Chapter 14: The Mystery of Waiting**

Why is waiting so hard? Why do you think God keeps some things a mystery to us?

Discuss what it means to see circumstances through eyes of faith.

Have you faced situations in your own life in which God enabled you to see through eyes of faith?

### **Chapter 15: Harvesting the Eternal**

How did the metaphor of the harvest describe the Felixes’ work in higher education?

What is the harvest of Kingdom work? What makes this type of harvest different from all others?

Use the harvest metaphor to describe your own work and life. What “crops” are you producing?

### **Chapter 16: It Is Well with My Soul**

Describe how Carol’s friendship and acts of kindness helped Vivian through her treatments.

How did the family demonstrate love and commitment to Vivian during her weeks at the Village in the City of Hope?

Have you ever shown this kind of love to anyone? Has anyone ever shown it to you?

### **Chapter 17: Human Weakness, Divine Power**

Doctors are human, too! What kind of impact did knowing Vivian have on Dr. Leong? In what ways was her job made easier by Vivian? More difficult?

What qualities are marks of a “good” doctor? Contrast the quality of care provided by Dr. Leong to the treatment Vivian received from the HMO staff described in Chapter 3. Do you think that Dr. Leong’s faith enabled her to serve Vivian better? What did she receive *from* Vivian?

### **Chapter 18: The Dying Seed**

How did Vivian's vision of the woman in the pool of white light bring comfort and encouragement to her?

Do you ever experience vivid dreams, visions, and intuition? If so, share an example.

### **Chapter 19: Parting Words**

In what ways did Vivian make the most of her final Christmas season on earth?

Were any parts of her letter to her family particularly poignant or meaningful to you?

### **Chapter 20: Images of Heaven**

How did the plane ride over Kauai give Vivian a picture of heaven?

Might the glimpses of heaven been a gift from God to encourage Vivian?

### **Chapter 21: Great Loss, Greater Joy**

Discuss why Carol "believed it to be an honor" to serve Vivian (page 156). Do you agree with that statement?

What elements of the Easter sermon were particularly encouraging to Vivian?

How did Vivian receive the strength needed not only to walk down the aisle at her son's wedding, but to do so with "a strange and graceful radiance"? (page 162).

### **Chapter 22: Facing Death**

If you had been a member of Vivian's family, how do you think you would have reacted to her desire to plan her own funeral?

Compare the reactions of Melissa, Doak, and Tris to their mother's illness and impending death. What were their various ways of working through their grief?

### **Chapter 23: Visions of Hope**

What gift did Vivian receive from God at Warwick Castle? How did she call on this gift years later?

How did Richard's vision at Waimea Canyon give him hope and comfort?

Consider the title of this book, *The School of Dying Graces*. What important lessons did Vivian and Richard learn in this "school"?

What have *you* learned? Has anything in this book touched you or made you think differently about illness, death, and eternity with Jesus?