

*This Present Darkness*  
**Book Discussion Guide**

Which of the human characters did you like best? Explain why.

Which of the human characters did you like the least? Explain why.

Why is the small college town of Ashton the perfect setting for this book?

As the story begins, Marshal Hogan is losing his family. As the story unfolds, he learns many things about himself and his family. Discuss Marshal's journey and how his priorities changed. What are your priorities? Is there any difference between what you say your priorities are and what your daily actions reveal about them?

Sandy is lonely and just wants Marshal to love her. Marshal does love Sandy, but can't express it. Why do they have such a difficult time communicating? Discuss how Shawn affects Sandy.

Why was it necessary for Marshal to go through such suffering? Can you think of a time when you went through a difficult ordeal and emerged stronger and having grown in your relationship with Christ due to your struggle?

Satan is very clever in his quest to obtain control over us and he often uses people we'd least expect at the time. For example, look at Shawn's appearance in Sandy's life and how easily she was led astray. Share a time when you've gotten off course and have been influenced negatively by others.

The evil spirits in the book include complacency, lust, deception, murder, lawlessness, deception, rebellion, and jealousy. Discuss the interaction between each of the evil spirits with the human characters in the book. Also explore any real life situations.

Discuss how evil spirits in the book treat one another. For example –follow what happens to Lucius as the plot unfolds. Also track Rafar's movements. Contrast the difference between how the human believers in the book treat one another with how the humans who have turned from God treat one another.

Describe the differences between what Pastor Young preaches and what Pastor Hank preaches. Discuss the differences in the people in the two congregations. Discuss the risks we all face if we stray from the teachings of Christ.

Discuss the role power, greed, and lust play in the lives of Pastor Young, Chief Brummel, and Professor Langstreet.

Professor Langstreet teaches classes such as "Know Your Inner Godness." She also uses spells, witchcraft, and other occult and brainwashing techniques to lead her students and

others away from Christ. There are many such influences in today's society. Why do people fall for such options rather than turning to Christ?

Pastor Young preaches that each person has the potential to become a God. Discuss why that approach may appeal to certain people. Discuss the pitfalls of such belief.

Discuss the people Pastor Hank talks to that have fled Ashton and decided not to stay and fight. What motivated each to leave? How is Pastor Hank different and why does he choose to stay in Ashton? Discuss a time when your Christian beliefs have been in conflict with influences of the secular world and how you handled it. Also discuss the places in the world where revealing your Christian beliefs could lead to death and how you think you'd react under such pressure.

Discuss Edith Duster and how the strength of her faith helps Pastor Hank.

Carmen becomes involved in the lives of Pastor Hank, Mary, and Marshal. Discuss her objectives and how she tries to accomplish them.

Follow Bernie's investigation into the death of her sister and the cover-up that occurred. Discuss the different people Bernie meets along the way and how she copes with what she learns.

From the time her character is introduced, Susan is conflicted. Discuss the source of her conflict and the changes occur.

How does Omni Corporation fit in with what is going on in Ashton? Discuss the role money, power and violence play in Omni's "corporate philosophy." Discuss the images that came to mind when you read the name "Universal Consciousness Society." Look at how Ashton was slowly infiltrated and taken over by Omni and Universal—can you see something like that actually occurring today?

Examine how the violence escalates as both Marshal and Pastor Hank get closer and closer to the truth about what is happening in Ashton. What was your reaction to the extreme violence at the end of the book?

When Marshal and Pastor Hank are placed together in custody, they have much to discuss. Pastor Hank talks to Marshal about salvation. Often we are most receptive when we are at our lowest. What do you do to maintain your relationship with Christ in both the good and bad times?

The battle between good and evil is shown in many ways and on different levels throughout the book. What are your beliefs regarding spiritual warfare? Although this book is a work of fiction, did it challenge your beliefs? If so, how?

In the book, the angels gain their strength from "prayer cover" produced by human prayer. Discuss your opinion of this concept.

Satan attacks by attempting to use our weaknesses against us and exploiting our human flaws. Look at each of the characters in terms of his or her individual weaknesses and flaws and discuss how the weakness or flaw was used against him or her.

Are you aware of your own weaknesses and flaws that make you susceptible to spiritual attack? What do you do to protect yourself?