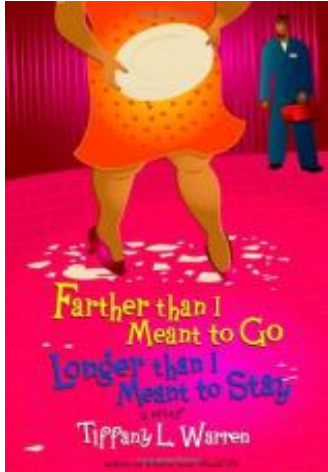

Farther Than I Meant To Go, Longer Than I Meant To Stay

by Tiffany L. Warren



About the Book

She's independent, successful, and fulfilled in her spiritual walk. But bank president Charmayne Ellis is also overweight, close-to-forty, and wondering if she will ever be as successful in her personal life. She's never gotten much praise or caring from her ever-critical mother and sister. And her friends are more into matchmaking than being truly supportive.

So it seems her prayers are answered when hardworking, saved, and just-too-fine Travis Moon asks Charmayne to marry him. Or were they? Charmayne soon finds the only thing her new husband has to share is one bad-news secret after another. Now, with her reputation and career destroyed and her life at rock bottom, her faith will be tested as never before. Her challenge will be to face her own willful heart—and find the courage to finally put herself in God's hands and discover where her real blessings lie.

Discussion Guide

1. Charmayne is inclined to deny the relevance of her spiritual health to her psycho-emotional condition. In your experience, what is the connection between our spirit self (1 *Corinthians* 2:6-16) and our physical or mental health?
2. Does Charmayne strike you as being selective or picky, possessing high standards or being impossible to please? Why? How do you make decisions about an eligible dating or marriage partner?
3. How does meeting Charmayne's mother shed light on Charmayne's character, personality, and hang-ups about her body image --- among other things? How do the voices of your childhood echo in your present sense of self? How does your faith help you respond to the negative messages?

4. Reread 2 *Samuel* 21 in a modern *Bible* translation. What do you think of Rizpah? In what ways can you identify with her? What do you think it was about her that drew a response from King David?
5. In your assessment, what's to like about Travis? What's to be concerned about? How do you discern whether the voice in your head is God --- or your own insecurities?
6. How would you react to an announcement like Travis's (that Charmayne was to be his wife)? What faith would you put in a man's conviction that God had given you to him? What would hold you back --- fear, lack of faith, low self-esteem . . . or common sense and the Holy Spirit?
7. What is your usual means for discerning God's will in your life? Does your method of discernment differ for decisions that are more important --- such as career, marriage, children, relocation, and the like? Why or why not?
8. Read *Genesis* 29 for yourself. With whom do you more readily identify --- Leah or Rachel? Why?
9. What qualities do you prioritize in a man? Which characteristics disqualify a brother from your consideration? What role does scripture or prayer have in your selection process?
10. How is Charmayne's recollection of her grandmother's bruised-peach pie comparable to a parable of Jesus? What spiritual or practical insight do you glean from the story?
11. "Just give me something to hold on to," Charmayne tells Travis. What do you hold on to in your life --- especially in your relationships? How does your hold on God affect your grasp on other people or things? (See *Matthew* 6:33; *Philippians* 2:4-8, and 3:9-14.)
12. As Christians, what responsibility do you think we have to take a chance on someone with a past --- be it financially, relationally, or otherwise? If God is a God of second chances, if we are called to forgive and restore, how do we balance that calling with guarding against wolves in sheep's clothing? (See *Psalms* 86:5; *Luke* 6:37, and 17:3-4; *2 Corinthians* 2:5-11.)
13. What's your philosophy on a long engagement, and why? What are the pros and cons? (See *Proverbs* 14:29b; *1 Corinthians* 7:9.)
14. What is the value of premarital counseling? (See *Proverbs* 11:14, 12:15, 15:22, and 19:20.)
15. Scripture makes clear that God may speak through dreams (see *Genesis* 37; *1 Kings* 3; *Daniel* 2; *Joel* 2:28). Have you ever perceived God speaking to you in such a way? How can you responsibly interpret a dream with spiritual meaning? (Again, look to *Proverbs* 11:14, 15:22, and 24:6.)
16. What experience have you had in the reciprocal benefits of ministry --- gaining as much as you give, learning as much as you teach? (Consider *Luke* 6:38; *2 Corinthians* 9:6.)
17. Did the pastor's revelation about finances being the prime cause of divorce surprise you? Why or why not? How do (or will) you handle money in your marriage? Do you feel strongly about finding a sugar daddy --- or being a sugar

mama? Do you think the Bible dictates roles or responsibilities in family finances? If so, what scriptures guide you, and why?

18. His biggest gift to me had been marrying me. What is your reaction to Charmayne's thought about Travis? Do you identify with that feeling? Why or why not? In what sense is such a perspective healthy --- or unhealthy?

19. Consider the biblical story of the Israelites' forty-year wandering in the wilderness. When have you taken an unnecessary detour in your life --- walking farther than God intended you to go? How did the Lord bring you back around --- and what good did He redeem from it (*Romans 8:28*)?

20. Consider how Charmayne reacted to the shocking truth about Travis, their marriage, and her job situation. What do you do when the world seems to crumble around you? Where do you turn --- and to whom? (*Psalms 121* offers a good starting place!)

21. For some reason I was relieved by the fact that she was a black woman. Why do we feel safer talking to someone who (even on the surface) seems most like us?

22. Tell someone in your group about yourself --- not just the situational statistics (age, race, marital status, occupation, family) but the real you. Consider it a glimpse of the future promised in *1 Corinthians 13:12*!

23. Reread *Matthew 5:43-45* and consider it in the context of a personal struggle with forgiving an enemy. What would it look like for you to put that verse into action? What keeps you from doing so?

24. Throughout this novel, Charmayne's self of sense is tied inextricably with issues of her weight. (Even in her healing process, she perceives that Jesus boosts her self-confidence by helping her lose weight.) Why do you think women are so hung up on appearances, biblical exhortations notwithstanding? Read again scriptures such as *Proverbs 31* (which says nothing about physical appearance), *1 Samuel 16:7*, and *1 Timothy 2:9-10* as affirmations.

Author Bio

Tiffany L. Warren is a technology manager who lives in suburban Cleveland, Ohio with her husband and four children. She is also the author of the critically acclaimed novel, **Farther Than I Meant to Go, Longer Than I Meant to Stay**.

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