

Divas of Damascus Road

by Michelle Stimpson



About the Book

Dianne Rucker had sworn to never come back to Dentonville, Texas. Sure, it was where she'd grown up under the loving care of her no-nonsense aunt Gloria and with her feisty cousins Yolanda and Regina. It was where she first found God's Word and a life-sustaining belief. But Dentonville was also the place where Dianne lost the person she loved the most, where guilt irrevocably shattered her spirit. Now she's home to celebrate her aunt's surprise wedding, briefly get together with her cousins, and find the fastest way out of town once she's done.

To her surprise, Dianne walks into a family gathering filled with unresolved pain as well as joy. Yolanda is struggling to reconcile her impossible standards with a chance at love she never expected. Regina's lifelong battle with her weight is threatening her successful career and marriage. And her straight-up, self-confident aunt Gloria is hiding an explosive, devastating secret. Here in Dentonville, the three generations of women must rely on one another and God's unfailing strength to face the truth and find forgiveness-if they are to at last claim all His blessings.

Discussion Guide

1. "That is how the guilt came to live in her spirit," the story says of Dianne. How have you experienced guilt as a living, breathing companion in your life (or in the life of someone you know)? How did it arrive and take up residence? How can it be evicted? (See Rom. 5:6-21; 8:1-9.)
2. Yolanda is appalled by Dianne's friend James and the behavior her cousin tolerates from that brother. In subsequent chapters, we learn just how little Yolanda is willing to tolerate, period. What do you refuse to tolerate in a man? In what areas are you willing to be more tolerant? What makes the difference?
3. While most of us know that "God doesn't look at the outward appearance," like Regina, most of us do. What do you see when you look in the mirror? How do you respond to that image-in your physical, mental, and spiritual life choices?

How healthy are your choices?

4. Romantic love or passion is an enigma to Yolanda, an anesthetic to Dianne, and an annoyance (or a disappointment) to Regina. What is it to you? Why? What do you think God intends for it to be? (Read Song of Songs to get some ideas!)

5. What was most convicting to you about the pastor's sermon in chapter 9? Why?

6. Scripture says, "Don't worry about tomorrow," but in this story, the past seems to be the bigger worry. Dianne uses sex to try to escape it. What escape routes do you prefer? What does God's word suggest as the best strategy for dealing with the past? (Contrast Deut. 32:7 and Phil. 3:13-14; see also Eccl. 3:11.)

7. Dianne relies on men and sex to feel better about herself (and the past), Regina uses food in much the same way, and Yo-yo cleans when she needs to restore a sense of stability and security. What do you use to feel better about yourself and your life? Why? What role does faith play, if any at all, in restoring your equilibrium or improving your sense of self?

8. Gloria acknowledged that Richard had undoubtedly been an answer to her prayers fifteen years ago, but she had been too fearful to accept him then. When has God answered your prayer-and you have hesitated to take hold of that answer? What has held you back? What were you afraid of, and why? What broke down that resistance for you-or are you still resisting?

9. Much like her mother, Yolanda similarly suspects that Kelan is an answer to prayer, but she fears the changes a man's presence in her life will bring-even the right man. From the beginning, Scripture makes clear that marriage demands change in both spouses (see Gen. 2:21-25). Whether you are married or not, consider what changes are involved in merging your life with a man's. What changes are desirable to you and which are dreaded? Why?

10. In what sense might Regina's relationship with food be considered idolatrous? What about the other characters in the stories-what do they seem to establish in God's place? What about you-what are you tempted to trust in, rely on, crave above God's presence?

11. Do you have a family member or friend who, like Joyce Ann or Dianne or Regina, is sick in body, mind, or spirit? How does this story suggest positive and negative approaches to intervention in such a loved one's life? What intervention model does Scripture offer? (See Matt. 18:15-20; also Gal. 6:1-10; 1 Tim. 5:20.)

12. What do you think about Aunt Toe's theory about black men and women? How do you see that dynamic at work in your life and your family?

13. After Kelan's ultimatum about their relationship, Yolanda interpreted her Scripture reading of Philippians 3:13-14 through her anger. When have your strong emotions lead you to misinterpret a Scripture, a situation, or a "sign from God"? How do you try to guard yourself against such skewed interpretations of God's leading?

14. "[Regina] knew that she was in self-destruct mode, sabotaging her marriage and herself." Paul described that kind of tendency toward self-destruct in Romans 7:14-24, but what hope did he offer in verse 25? What does your self-destruct mode look like? How do you turn off the switch?

15. Who in your life and family plays the role of Aunt Toe, speaking the truth in love? How do you and others accept that person and the truth he or she has to speak? Are you ever that person? Why or why not?

16. Dianne longs for a mother's love. Yo-yo yearns for a father's love. Regina suffers from a lack of self-love. All three women wrestle with the ability to love others. What's your issue with love? What do you suspect (or know) is the answer to your problems and questions about love? Take the time to explore Scripture and some of its insights into the power of love.

17. In chapter 1, we learned how the guilt had come to live inside Dianne. Now she is instrumental in serving eviction notices on the monsters of guilt, blame, penance, and despair that had moved in on her loved ones. How does her life illustrate the principle Paul observed in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7? How does your life illustrate it?

18. How have you experienced the difference between "constructive conviction" and guilt? How do you discern which you are feeling? How do you transform one into the other?

19. Yolanda and Regina realize that even in the absence of an earthly father growing up, they always had a heavenly one. What does the image of God as Father mean to you? How have your experiences with (or without) a father influenced your understanding of God-and vice versa?

20. Dianne says, "Now I understand what people mean when they talk about the story behind the glory." What's the story behind your glory?

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