

# The Best We've Been

Book Club Kit

"[An] excellent finale to Vogt's  
Thatcher Sisters series."

— *Publishers Weekly*



# Praise for *The Best We've Been*

"This tale will leave you smiling and thinking of the characters long after you've read the last page."

Rachel Hauck, *New York Times* bestselling author

"A compelling story of sisterhood and second chances."

Melissa Tagg, Carol Award-winning author of  
*Now and Then and Always* and the Walker Family series

"[A] tearjerker of a series finale. *The Best We've Been* handles sensitive topics with grace and sensitivity."

Carla Laureano, RITA Award-winning author of *The Solid Grounds Coffee Company*

"While the relationships with my sisters were certain to falter because we were distinctive individuals, there was an underlying stability to it that had never been there before. We were the Thatcher sisters—in spite of our differences."

Johanna in *The Best We've Been*



# Discussion Questions

- 1 *The Best We've Been* begins with Johanna facing an unwanted pregnancy, which opens up a myriad of issues: the sanctity of life, women's choice, abortion, adoption, and the emotional tug-of-war between personal beliefs. What was your reaction to Johanna's dilemma? How did you feel about her doctor's approach to their first appointment? Have you ever clashed with someone else over deeply held beliefs? What was the result?
- 2 This story explores the question *How can you choose what is right for you when your decision will break the heart of someone you love?* How did this play out between Johanna and Jillian? If you've had to make a choice like this, how did you handle it?
- 3 Jillian struggles with her newfound faith because it doesn't seem like God is answering her prayers. How do you react when your prayers aren't answered the way you'd hoped? What would you say to a new believer who is struggling to trust God? Or to someone who is bitter toward God because of how things have gone in their life?
- 4 Family roles often define us as we're growing up: we're the middle child or the athletic one or the quiet one. Several characters in this story comment on what it means to be adults and how sometimes family members don't let us grow up—don't recognize that we've changed from who we were as children. What has helped your family recognize that you are no longer a child? If they haven't, how do you think you can help them see that you're different?

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- 5 There are some interesting—and humorous—scenes that show Payton struggling to fit in to the couples' Bible study she and Zach attend. Have you ever been a newcomer to a group and found it hard to learn the "rules" and lingo? Or maybe you found yourself as the one using the insider language. What can we learn from both perspectives?
- 6 Johanna misinterpreted past events because she didn't know all the details. As a result, she cut herself off from her family relationships and from playing the piano, a pursuit she loved. When have you looked back at an event or time and realized you had misjudged a situation or a person? What did you do about it?
- 7 In the Thatcher family, Johanna has always been in charge, Jillian has always been the mediator, and Payton has always believed that there was an invisible line separating her from Johanna and Jillian—that their relationship is stronger than one she could have with them. How do the sisters' relationships change from the beginning of this book to the end?
- 8 The title *The Best We've Been* implies that things are good for Johanna, Jillian, and Payton—that their circumstances, possibly their relationships, have improved. But did their stories end the way you expected them to?
- 9 Jillian tells Geoff she wants to take a "time-out" from conversations about their future. Do you think this was a wise choice? How do you think the time-out could benefit them? Or what do you think they should've done instead?
- 10 As the story ends, Johanna and Beckett have found a friendly dynamic, but their relationship has no clear resolution. What do you think will happen for them in the future?

"Like everything else I did, I'd do it myself . . . and I'd have to live with this decision for the rest of my life."

Johanna in *The Best We've Been*



# We All Need Someone to Lean On

By Beth K. Vogt

Take a few minutes and read this blog post excerpt. Then, discuss with your group your initial impressions of Johanna and how they changed throughout the story.

Self-reliance is an admirable character quality, right?

Some people are naturally independent. They know what they want out of life and make detailed plans to accomplish their goals without help from anyone else.

But sometimes we develop self-reliance because we've been hurt by the painful actions or accusations of family or friends. We decide we don't need anyone and we push people away. Going it alone? It's less painful than being in relationship with others—or so we believe.

Johanna Thatcher is quite content with her carefully constructed life in Colorado. She's satisfied with a long-distance relationship, with her career, and with her well-honed ability to tell her younger sisters how they should live their lives.

Readers met Johanna in book one of my three-book series, but she doesn't come center stage until the final novel. At first glance, Johanna seems like nothing more than a control freak. But I also weave in glimpses of Johanna's story—both present day and past—to explain her super-size self-assurance.

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As I threw multiple complications at Johanna—losing a promised promotion, discovering her fiancé cheated on her—I also undermined her self-confidence. Her independence hid emotional pain that lingered from her childhood. Johanna believed her parents preferred her twin sisters over her. Because of this, Johanna gave up something she loved because she didn't think anyone cared.

All relationships are risky because they require vulnerability, require that we share honestly about who we are. Avoiding emotional intimacy with family and friends offers us nothing but loneliness in the end.

**"[*The Best We've Been* is] a memorable addition to any favorites shelf!"**

Kristy Cambron, author of  
*The Butterfly and the Violin*

Yes, we need to recognize that there are different personality types—those of us who express inner thoughts more easily and those of us who are natural listeners. But relationships are a matter of give and take . . . and time. We need to consider this when we meet an overwhelmingly self-reliant person. Instead of presuming they don't need a friend, perhaps we could pause and consider why someone hesitates to connect with us. Maybe there's heartache behind the virtual wall they've erected, as there was for Johanna.

Let's wait before we jump to a possible wrong conclusion about those who, at first glance, seem to be able to take care of themselves and even offend us with their bossiness. See if a little care and concern from you might prompt them to open up. It's always good to remember the best relationships take time.

Read the full article on [Crazy4Fiction.com](http://Crazy4Fiction.com).









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