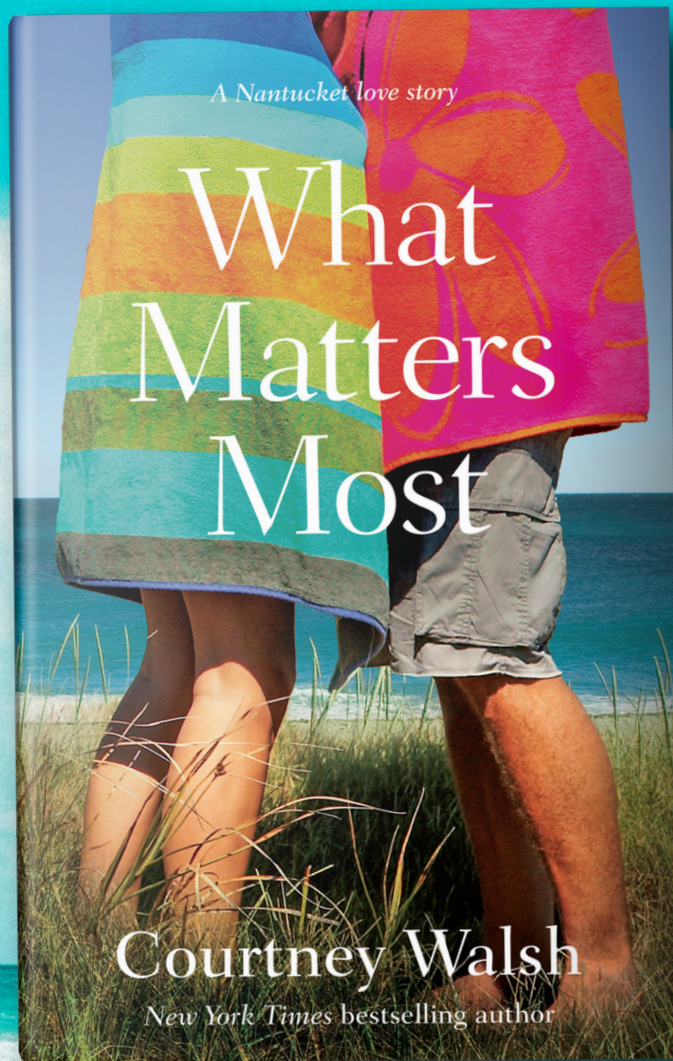


# Book Club Kit



**"*What Matters Most* is a tender and charming romance novel whose troubled characters inspire hope."**

**FOREWORD REVIEWS**



# About Courtney Walsh



Courtney Walsh is a *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author. She writes small-town romance and women's fiction while juggling the performing arts studio and youth theatre she owns and runs with her husband. Courtney is a Carol Award winner and Christy Award finalist who has also written two craft books and several full-length musicals. She lives in Illinois with her husband and three children and a sometimes-naughty Bernedoodle named Luna.

Visit her online at [courtneywalshwrites.com](http://courtneywalshwrites.com).



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## Dear Readers,

If we're friends on social media, you may already know that I got the idea for this book years ago when I was living in Colorado. I'd just gone to the movies by myself because (a) my kids were young and I needed alone time, and (b) I didn't know anyone in Colorado yet.

Before you think how sad and pathetic I was to go out alone, I have to tell you there was something wonderful about it. Being able to process my thoughts on my own and let my mind wander was a gift—and I didn't even realize it at the time.

I like time alone with my thoughts, because I get ideas, as was the case on that day driving home from the movies. Some ideas flit through my mind and are gone the next day. Others stick with me for a little while but eventually lose steam. Still others, like this one . . . don't want to go away.

It's been years. I've had this book idea in my back pocket all this time, so when it finally came time to sit down and write it, it poured out of me quicker than just about any book I've written up until now.

But it also surprised me. There were unexpected moments—for instance, Emma's secret—that even I didn't see coming. And what ended up happening as I spent time with these characters, unraveling their story, was a very clear picture of grace and forgiveness, not just for one character, but for both Emma and Jamie.

The two of them are on parallel journeys and both are looking for the same thing—forgiveness—a theme often found in my books. This time, the need for that forgiveness felt even more important; these characters weren't going to be able to move on with their lives until they had it.

And the only way to get it was to let their secrets come out.

*Continued on the next page*





I think the truth is powerful. And when a particular truth is holding us hostage because it's attached to our shame, it will lose its power only when it's brought into the light. That is the key to this story, I think, the big takeaway wrapped up in a sweet romance set on a beautiful island.

It means the world to me that you would choose to read this book. I know how many books are out there, how many options you have. So thank you for taking a chance on my latest story. I hope you love reading it as much as I loved writing it.

If you're so inclined, I'd love to connect with you via my website: [www.courtneywalshwrites.com](http://www.courtneywalshwrites.com). I'm always in the market for new friends . . . even though I'm still quite happy to go to the movies by myself. :)

*Courtney*







**Meet**

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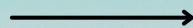
*Emma*

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**and**

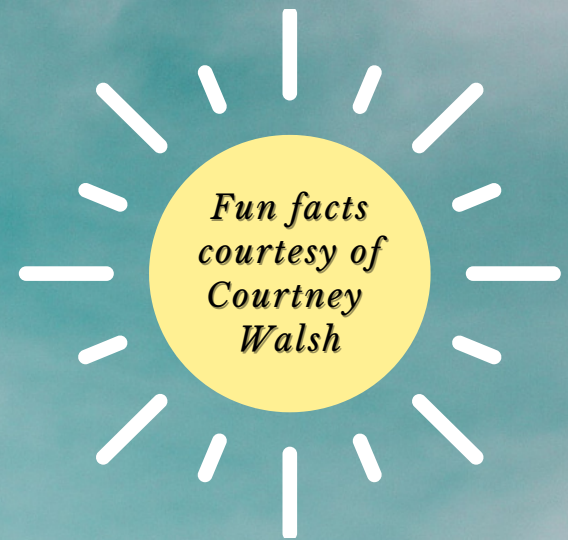
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*Jamie*





# Meet Emma



**Emma's favorite inspirational quote:** "You can always begin again."

**If she could travel anywhere in the world, she'd visit:** Honestly, I think she's going there at the start of the book. I think she'd pick Nantucket . . . because it makes her feel close to her late husband.

**Her biggest fear:** I can't say . . . it would be a giant spoiler. ;)

**One dream she has for her future:** To get to a place where she can truly forgive herself and move forward.

**The show she watches on the weekends:** *The Great British Baking Show*, of course!

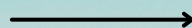
**Her favorite thing about Jamie:** While Emma wholly appreciates Jamie's good looks, what draws her to him most is his kindness. And his creativity.

**The song she's always playing on repeat in the car:** "Let My Love Open the Door" because it makes her happy—and she's had too much sadness to pick anything that doesn't make her happy.

**Her favorite place on Nantucket Island:** While she loves the beach, I think the art gallery might be her favorite place because of what it represents to her.

**One word she'd choose to describe Jamie:** Intriguing

**One thing that inspires her:** Her family. I think she's inspired by both her in-laws and her son. I think she's inspired by the person her in-laws believe she can be and the person she wants to be for her son.





# Meet Jamie



**If he could travel anywhere in the world, he'd visit:** He's been all over the world. Jamie would most love to settle down in one place. He didn't expect that to be Nantucket, but he's warming up to the idea of making it a home.

**His biggest fear:** Never being able to get rid of his regret

**One dream he has for his future:** To be creative with his photography again . . . but he's not exactly aware of that yet.

**The show he watches on the weekends:** *The Great British Baking Show!*

**His favorite thing about Emma:** Her resilience

**The song he's always playing on repeat in the car:** Jamie is more of a "sounds of the road" kind of guy. His mind is loud, so he likes to let it wander.

**His favorite place on Nantucket Island:** Emma's house.

**One word he'd choose to describe Emma:** Strong

**One thing that inspires him:** Emma's ability to begin again inspires him. He hasn't quite figured out how to do that yet . . .







Q&A

with

Courtney

Walsh



# Q&A

## **Several characters in *What Matters Most* are artists—what wisdom from your life as a creative did you include in the story?**

I am always drawn to the arts when dreaming up characters. Creating characters who love art or photography is right in my wheelhouse, so I love researching these things simply because I love it! (You'll probably never find a mathematical character in one of my books for the opposite reason!) I think my life as a creative informs a lot of these character traits simply because it's not book research I've read about, but experiences I've had, so I'm able to make them a little more believable as a result.

## **Who is your favorite minor character in this story?**

Emma's father-in-law. I love writing older, wiser characters because I think there is so much to be gained from listening to their perspectives. I loved their relationship and the way he helped her navigate her faith journey, and I loved that he ultimately wanted her to be happy.

## **The title, *What Matters Most*, is an inviting, hopeful title—can you give us a hint at what the characters learn matters most?**

Forgiveness matters most. It's at the heart of every story I write, I think, because it's not natural for us to want to forgive someone who has hurt us. It goes against our human nature to say, "Yes, you hurt me—a lot—but I'm going to forgive you." Oftentimes, people aren't even sorry and don't deserve our forgiveness, but letting it go, laying it down, that's critical for our own mental health.

## **What role does the Nantucket setting play in this story? Is it a place of healing for the characters?**

Oh, Nantucket, how I love it! Yes, the settings in my stories play such a huge part of the overall story, and in this case, Nantucket becomes a place of second chances. I love when a setting can be woven into the story in that way, providing much-needed peace for my characters.

## **What do you hope readers will be inspired by in this novel?**

I always want my books to feel like an escape, especially from the realities of life these days. I want readers to feel uplifted and hopeful and whisked away to a stunning location where they can get lost in a love story. But deeper than that, I hope that readers are challenged to forgive. Not only anyone who might've wronged them, but themselves. I think oftentimes forgiving ourselves is much, much harder than forgiving someone else.





# Discussion Questions

*Tip: Get your book club conversation flowing by kicking off the conversation with the discussion questions on the next page!*





1.) To help Emma move beyond her grief, her friend Elise helps her create a list of things she wants to do. How can a list of goals or dreams be helpful? Are there any drawbacks to creating a list like this? How did it help Emma?

2. Emma and Jamie's first meeting involves a misunderstanding. How would their relationship have been different if Emma had known why Jamie was really there? Should Jamie have tried harder to set the record straight? Have you ever had to clarify something with a friend or loved one when it would have been easier to let it slide?

3. Emma and Jamie both have supportive family and friends, including mature Christians who speak truth to them. Do you have a helpful support network? What are some things you can do to help develop and strengthen these kinds of relationships?

5. Emma and Jamie are both artists who have set aside their art for personal reasons. Do you have a talent or interest that you're currently not pursuing? What's standing in your way? How important is it that we use whatever special abilities we may have?

6. Jamie doesn't think he could have PTSD since he isn't in the military. Do you agree with him? Have you or someone you love experienced PTSD?

7. Jamie's therapist suggests he write letters to the people he believes he has hurt as part of processing his feelings. Have you ever written not-to-be-delivered letters or used journaling to work through something? How is this helpful? What is hard or challenging about it?

*Discussion questions continued on next page*

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8.) Jamie and Emma both know, intellectually, that God forgives sin when we repent and ask for his forgiveness (see 1 John 1:8-9). Why do both of them struggle with accepting God's forgiveness and moving beyond their feelings of guilt? How have you seen this struggle play out in your own life or the life of someone you care about? Why do our emotions sometimes contradict what we know to be true?

9. If overthinking was an Olympic sport, Emma says she'd have more gold medals than Michael Phelps. Is overthinking an issue for you? What kinds of things set it off, and how have you learned to deal with it? Or if you don't experience this yourself, what advice would you give someone who does?

10. Emma's father-in-law tells her, "It's awful hard to lose someone you love. But moving on is a natural part of life. Doesn't mean you forget the person you loved. Doesn't even mean you stop loving them. Just means you stay among the living." Do you agree with his advice? What are some of the things that make it hard to move on after a significant loss? What might make it easier?

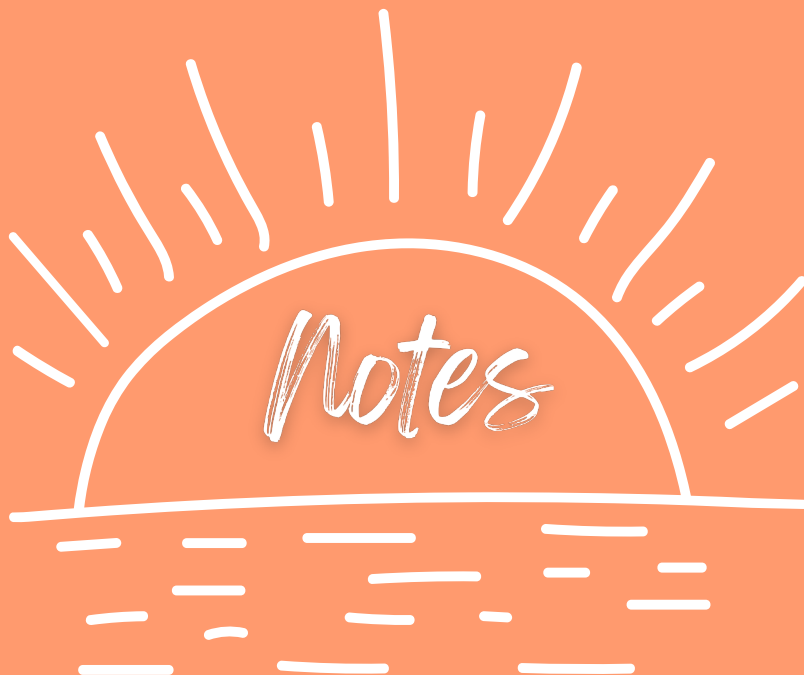
11. Were you surprised when you found out what it was that Emma felt so guilty about? Can you relate to her fear of the consequences of her actions, even after God has forgiven her? How does Emma finally break free from her guilt and shame?

12. At the end of the story, Jamie has decided to relocate to Nantucket, and Emma believes they have a real chance at being happy. What changes and growth do you see in both of them that support this hope? What challenges will they still have to face as time passes? Did this feel like a satisfying ending for the book?

*Now that your group has discussed these questions, go around and have each member ask one question they had about the story to get even more insight into the novel.*

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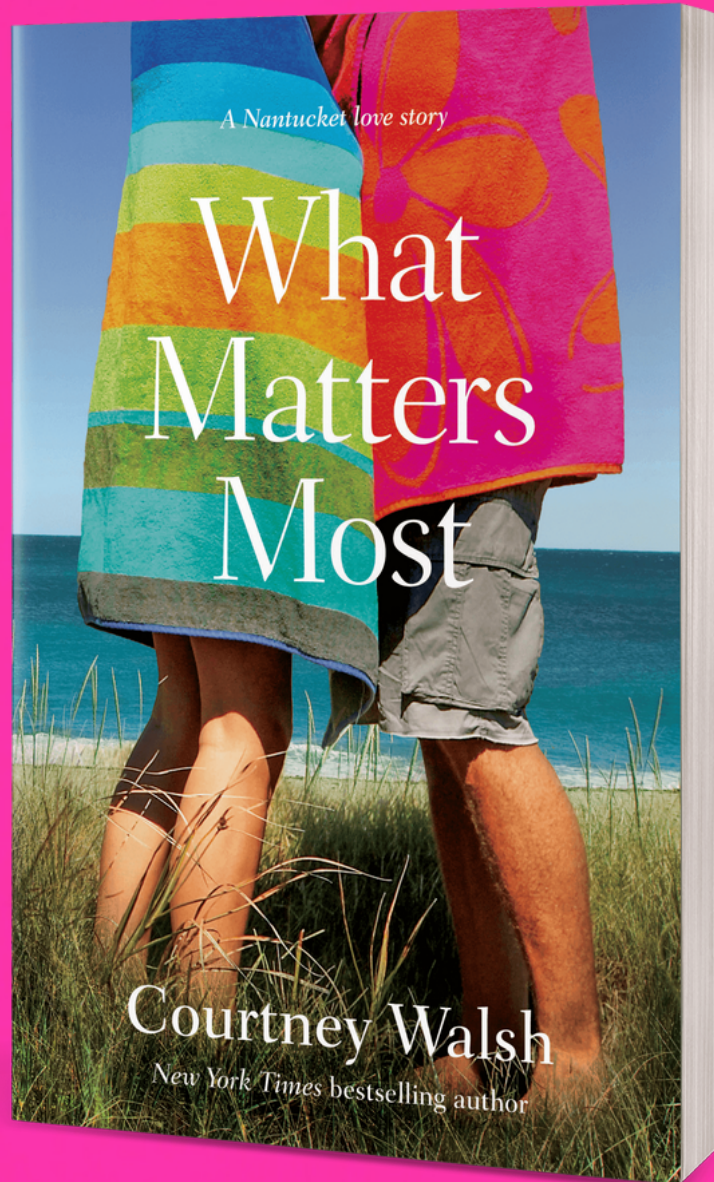




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Thanks for choosing

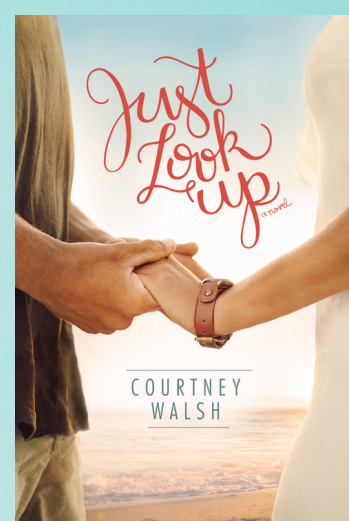
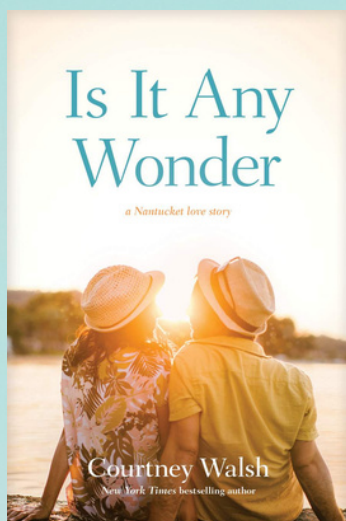


for you book club!





# Discover more swoon-worthy romances by Courtney Walsh



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