

Hallie's Heart

Chapter Eight:: Let's Talk About It:

1. Adam and Julie Dean made the decision to live near Julie's parents, feeling it was the right thing to do. In today's culture, a decision to move near parents, often at the expense of career offers or other interests, can be considered foolish. Can a decision such as this be wise? Foolish? What does God see when He examines your decisions?

2. Sadie has an inaccurate image of how others view her. She cannot believe she is forgiven, and she especially cannot believe she could be trusted by others. Adam says to her, "Sadie, you're the one who refuses to believe what this family has told you over and over again, and I'll say it again now. You're forgiven for what you did last summer, and if you'd take the time to think about it, you'd realize I've never brought it up to you."

What kinds of lies could Sadie be believing about herself? About others? Where are those lies coming from?

3. Adam continues speaking to Sadie, "But if you want to be trusted again, you have to act like someone who can be trusted. That would mean honoring your mom's curfew and the rules she sets down for you. Oh, and not acting like a martyr for being in a family that's put themselves on the line because they give you a few rules to live by."

Do you think a person must earn trust, or should trust be given freely? Are forgiveness and trust the same thing? Can you have one without the other?

4. Why would Sadie act like a martyr? What is she trying to say through her behavior?

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Chapter Nine: Let's Talk About It:

1. Hallie ran to her Aunt Mona's because she wanted to "stop hating herself" for what she believes she has done to her sister, Stacy. Mona gently points Hallie to a step she must take, which is to forgive herself. She says, "That comes first. Sometimes it comes in bits and pieces every day for a long time."

Forgiving yourself can be harder than forgiving another person. God does want you to forgive yourself, and He has forgiven you the moment you ask. But Satan has no interest in you forgiving yourself. He wants to keep you strapped to the pain of unforgiveness. Is there anything you cannot seem to forgive yourself for doing? Not doing? Saying? When you are faced with those self-destructive feelings of unforgiveness, what can you do?

2. As Hallie angrily continues to search for answers about God and Stacy's death, she rails at Mona furiously, "Your God is a monster! Yes, He hurt me, and He hurts millions of people every day. He lets there be wars and babies who die of cancer and parents who abuse their kids and people who starve, and giant waves that wipe people off the planet! And you want me to believe He's a God who cares?"

There have been many books written about why God allows things to happen, and the debate continues. Do we need answers for what God allows? If so, what might those answers be? If not, how do we reconcile those things in our hearts and minds?

3. Mona tells Hallie, we are actually "the cause of His (God's) pain. Maybe that's one reason He understands us so well. In our hearts, we all measure God by how we think He's managing our little piece of the world. But His plan is bigger than that. He's bigger than that. I think His plan is bigger than just whether your sister and my niece drowned. I think it takes in the whole universe and beyond. He lets me see glimpses of it, but only glimpses, and I'd miss them entirely if I wasn't looking and didn't believe they were there."

Do you think we can be the source of God's pain? How? Have you ever experienced a "glimpse" of what you believe was part of God's bigger plan?

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4. Mona tells Hallie, “Just be still, girl. God’s coming. He’s tracking you down until He knows you’re safe.”

Do you see God as a Father who loves you enough to track you down?

5. Near the conclusion of Chapter Nine, Mona says that she trusts something bigger than her pain. She says, “...pain always drives us toward God or away from Him, and I’ve allowed it to drive me toward Him. That’s a precious thing to me.”

Do you believe you have this choice? Do you believe it is possible to go back and forth?

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Chapter Ten: Let's Talk About It:

1. The Prayer Tower at Gilead Christian Conference Center is respected as “a place to be alone with God.” Do you need a place to be alone with God? If so, does it have to be a tower or a remote location? List a place or two that you will choose to be alone with God.

2. Mona came to the Prayer Tower needing to spend time alone with God over the agonizing situation she was facing. “At times her pleading was hedged by words. At other moments, her heart cry came with words that could not be uttered.” Do you believe you can pray without words? Do you believe God understands you with words? Without words?

3. Dan tells Mona that he must drop out of school for a year to earn money, which puts some “kinks” in his plans. Mona responds, reflecting, “I don't think there are any ‘kinks,’ Dan, just pauses while we figure out what's coming next...pauses and prayers.”

Pauses are frustrating at times. Are they useful? How?

4. At times it seems we pray most when we are paused or halted in our plans? Does it make you angry when that happens? Is it possible to learn to recognize and even appreciate pauses?

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Chapter Eleven: Let's Talk About It:

1. Mona had some “mind-bending and emotionally draining” days with Hallie. “From one moment to the next, it was difficult to predict whether she would erupt in a shower of tears, or stalk off in a sullen silence.” So Mona was thankful when she found herself in a few moments of solitude.

How do you feel in moments of solitude? Do you enjoy them and benefit from them? Do you run from them and try to fill up the “quiet?”

2. Hallie's behavior has been very difficult for Mona to deal with in the last few days. In fact, there have been times when Hallie has been overflowing with anger or sorrow, lashing out at Mona. Mona is doing a wonderful job of seeing through those moments and responding in love – and sometimes firm truth. Sometimes family members or friends do not respond as well. Hallie's parents have not typically responded well.

How do you feel when someone does not respond well to you at a difficult time in your life?

Is there a way you can take steps to understand yourself and others? Is it possible to move beyond the mired situation and start over?

3. Dan and Mona manage to convince Hallie to play in a beach volleyball tournament instead of continuing to sleep all day. When Hallie returns, Mona notices that the “shadows disappeared from her eyes. A small thing, but wasn't God in the small things?”

Is it possible that healing takes place in small things? Is so, how could you miss them? Do they find you, or do you have to find them?

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Chapter Twelve: Let's Talk About It:

1. Hallie is missing in the morning, and Mona panics and runs looking down the beach. When she stumbles upon her, Hallie angrily challenges her, "...you wondered if I'd gone off to hurt myself." Mona responds, "And would you?" Hallie answers that she is not sure. Mona wisely replies with a question, "Then it's alright if I wasn't sure either?"

Hallie cuts herself more slack than she cuts her aunt, and her aunt calls her on it. Do you cut yourself more or less slack than you cut others? How do you respond when they call you on it?

2. God is often working both in us and through us. God is working in Mona as she realizes the extent of her unforgiveness toward her father. He is working through her to help Hallie forgive herself. Has there been a situation in your life when God was working both in you and through you? Is there one now?

3. Hallie needed to say out loud that she would not harm herself, and that to talk about the nightmare she was having. And she needed to talk about the "sin" she feels she has committed that would be so bad that she might not be forgiven. "At that moment, Mona recognized the power of woundedness. Of Hallie's, and of her own."

How can wounds hold power over you? Are there any wounds that hold power over you now? Do your wounds affect others in your life? If so, how do you go about finding healing?

4. Mona did not immediately tell Ellen that she could not find Hallie. Is it a lie to choose the timing to tell a truth? Was it an act of deceit to not tell Ellen immediately, or an act of mercy? Would it have been OK to never tell Ellen the truth?

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Chapter Thirteen: Let's Talk About It:

1. "Mona's thoughts drifted to her father, and for the first time in many months, she let them come. Stark memories of the man who measured all things against himself – his intellect, his finances, his accomplishments."

What do you think "measured all things against himself" means? Do you think he "measured up" in his own eyes?

2. "She had been just a child when the realization had taken root in her heart that he had measured her in all things as well, and she had always been found wanting."

What would make a parent "measure a child and find her wanting?" Do you think her perceptions about how her father sees her are accurate? Is it possible that they are not? Either way, how could she decide to deal with those feelings now?

3. Everyone has a story. Every life holds circumstances with the ability to wound a person and make that person hide true feelings or act in ways that hurt others. Has someone hurt you? Would it help you heal if you understood a little more about the circumstances that shaped that person? Why or why not?

4. You have a story. Have you experienced any circumstances that shaped you into a person you would rather not be? Have you hurt anyone? If so, what can you do or say now to change the rest of the story?

5. Hallie said, "Some things are not worth forgiving." Is this true?

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Chapter Fourteen: Let's Talk About It:

1. Mona faces a point when she must go honestly to God, praying, "Lord, I don't know if I can do this. All of this – Hallie, the shop. You've got to direct my feet for the next step. Some days I feel like it might be time to go back to teaching. I don't have to keep this place; I can give it up if that's what You want. But I can't give up on Hallie, because I know You haven't given up on her. And I know You haven't given up on me. I know You are asking me to lay it all down, to do the hard work in my own heart so I can show Hallie how to do it in hers."

What does "lay it all down" mean? Is it hard work? If so, does it get easier with time?

2. What hard work must Mona do in her own heart? Why does she have to do this in order to show Hallie how to do it?

3. Hallie made several remarks to Adam Dean containing innuendos about her unmarried aunt. In our society this has become the norm. Adam chose to ignore them. Is he "normal?" What jokes and comments are appropriate coming from Christians? From people who are not Christians? How can you respond to inappropriate jokes and comments to maintain moral boundaries while still exhibiting the love of Christ?

4. As Chapter Fourteen concludes, Mona realizes Adam Dean had been the kind person who surprised her with her mother's lost chair. She "began to truly understand what it meant to feel like a fool." What should she do now? If she approaches Adam to make amends and he will not forgive her, what should she do?

5. Have you experienced a situation like Mona's where you misjudged someone and hurt them? Have you experienced this more often than you would like to admit? If so, what is causing you to think about people the way you do?
