

Morning Song

Chapter One: Let's Talk About It:

1. As the story begins Mona is struggling to recover from her head injury. The process is long and hard. Frustrated and angry, she sees her affliction as parallel to that of Miss Emily's injured cat. She says to the cat, "I understand why you must have a deep-seated mistrust of humans. And I'm sorry I was planning your demise in kind of an...imaginative way. I was letting my mind play with how good it would feel to just hurl something...you know, let it all fly, inflict some pain because I'm hurting."

Are you struggling with something – or have you struggled in the past – and frustrated with the process of healing? Your struggle could be physical, emotional, or spiritual. Write about your struggle and the feelings you have below.

2. Sometimes we feel helpless to do anything about our situations and we take our anger and frustration out on someone or something in our lives. Mona fantasized about killing the cat. Have you had similar thoughts about taking it out on someone or something else? Are you having them now?

3. Have you actually acted out your anger and frustration on someone or something? Is there a place – or places – where you need to make restitution? How will you act in the future? Decide on a more positive plan for dealing with the struggles you will face now.

4. The reason Mona had such terrible feelings toward the cat is that every time she saw that cat it reminded her of "who she had become- one of the broken and dazed who listed a bit to port with a body that longed to be what it once had been. She wore her imperfections where everyone could see them, and people pitied her for it."

Is there a reminder in your life of something painful? Imagine Jesus speaking to you in a warm, loving voice. What would He say to you? As you end this chapter ask Him to help you hear his voice above all others- including your own.

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Chapter Two: Let's Talk About It

1. In Chapter Two we turn to what is going on in Hallie's life. In addition to her mother's alcoholism and her father's poor decisions she must also face the realities of this life. She realizes that the grades of students are affected as much by whom their parents are as they are by knowledge and achievement. "Chelsea Delaney will get eighteen out of twenty for having a father on the school board, even though she doesn't know the difference between Charles Dickens and Charles Manson. And Hallie Bowen will get seven out of twenty for saying what she thinks."

Life is unfair. How has life been unfair to you? How did you – or how are you – handling it?

2. Hallie keeps telling herself "Today will be better...the important thing was to just keep moving, to do the next thing, to take the hurdle in front of you, one at a time, even if it felt like it was set a bit higher than the day before. Look down the road, and you'd never make it.

Do any hurdles lie before you? Are you able to think and pray about your situation with just enough vision to see reality clearly? Can you keep from looking too far down the road?

3. Hallie is blessed to have a friend who has stayed by her side. "In the two years since Stacy had died, her friend had pretty much seen it all and stuck by her through depression, counseling, drinking, and running away. " She had even helped Hallie with the situations that resulted from her mother's drinking.

Do you have a friend who had stuck by you through good times and bad? Have you been that kind of friend?

4. Hallie's mom is in denial about her drinking problem. And Hallie has been silently hoping it would get better, but it hasn't. She begins to see silence is enabling the problem to continue. "I'm helping a screwed up parent who won't face her substance-abuse issues...Of course if we actually said the truth out loud, my mother might have to face the truth."

Is there a truth you long to say to someone in your life? Write the words that you would use to speak that truth as Christ would have you speak it.

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5. Is there a truth you need to face about yourself? If there is, how would someone who cares about you tell you? How would you react? Write your honest answers below.

6. Hallie has rounded a bend in dealing with the aftermath of her mother's drinking. The time she says, "I don't think I'm supposed to be doing this anymore I can't do it. This time you're going to have to clean up your own mess."

Hallie is at the point of making a healthy choice – defining a boundary for what she will and will not do in order to make healthy decisions about her life. Is there a place in your life where a boundary needs to be set in order for you to be healthy?

7. Examine your own life, too. Is there a place where someone could consider a boundary with your actions (or inaction)? Consider all aspects of your life, including, but not limited to, drinking, eating, working, shopping, spending, drugs, out of control emotions...? Be honest and loving with yourself. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God. He loves us and wants us to grow beyond those sins. What would He want you to do? What do you think He would say to you?

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Chapter Three: Let's Talk About It

1. Mona had a lot of grieving to do. Her niece drowned while in her care. She has suffered a head injury and faces a long recovery, if she fully recovers at all. Her sister is an alcoholic. In addition to grieving, Mona is also angry. She has “Anger at God for allowing these things to happen in her life. While she was grieving Stacy’s drowning, Mona “prayed through that grief and anger in steady increments, letting it fall from her cupped hands like water as she’d parted her fingers of guilt.”

Think about the idea of praying through grief and anger in “steady increments.” Is this a new concept for you? Do you believe God understands and supports this way of dealing with grief and anger?

2. Mona had “fought against Ellen’s attempts to refill her hands again and again – blaming her for not staying with the girls for those few seconds on the beach that day, for not coming faster, for allowing Hallie and Stacy to swim at all. It had taken almost two years for Ellen to speak to Mona again...”

It has been said that when we refuse to forgive we hold another person in bondage. We hold ourselves in bondage as well. Is there someone in your life you have not forgiven? If so, how and when will you forgive?

3. Some days Mona “still thought it might have been better if she’d just curled up in a heap and let the angels pluck her up. But most mornings she focused on how good it felt to gulp deep draughts of loamy air on a crisp morning as her dragging feet sent heaps of auburn and yellow leaves billowing in her wake.”

On the heels of every hardship often come good days. Is there a time in your life when you were ready to give up? Did good days follow the bad? Write about that experience, and others you can remember, so you can draw upon those memories should dark days face you again.

4. Mona talks honestly with God about her feelings, saying, “I’m not bolted down too tightly these days, Lord. One minute, I’m thinking about beaming a cat with a brick, and the next, I want to lie down and die myself. Part of me is grateful I’m alive, and the other is angry I’m not the

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same Mona I was before. It seems like when I'm praying these days I'm spending most of my time apologizing for not being who I think I should be and being ashamed at who I am." Who does God say you are? Do you hear conflicting voices? Write what is being said by those voices that is untrue and change them to God's truth.

5. Mona struggles on her daily attempt to walk in order to heal. She asks God to help her walk "just ten blocks. It didn't seem like a lot to ask from You – the God who designed mosquito wings and the northern lights."

Is there a place where you feel God has "let you down" and you can't see why?

6. Mona continues to talk with God, asking, "Does even sitting have to be hard, Lord? And when did I turn into a whiner – a middle-aged, brain-damaged, broken-down whiner with really bad hair, for that matter? I can hardly stand myself like this, and I don't see how You can stand me. I'm frustrated and angry, and I'm tired of being that person."

Are you frustrated and angry with yourself over something? Are you tired of feeling the way you do? Can you "stand yourself?" Do you believe God can stand you? What can you do to change things?

7. Because of her head injury there are many things Mona enjoyed that she can no longer do. They were "Things she'd tried to tell herself didn't matter, except they did. They'd crawled into the nooks and crannies of her mind where fear and fatigue lived, and she'd tried to keep them hidden there, but hiding them had only forced them deeper."

Do you believe God cares about the things that matter to you? Even the small things? What do you think He is feeling when you are hurting?

8. Finally, Mona asks God, "what if this is all there is? Am I ready to live with that?" Are you ready to live with your life as it is?

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Chapter Four: Let's Talk About It

1. Joe Spencer, a police officer on duty happened to pull Hallie over for speeding, only to discover that Ellen was passed out drunk in the back seat. Recognizing how dire the situation was he called an ambulance, and prepared to tell Hallie and Mona the bad news.

Have you ever had to deliver painful news? Have you had it delivered to you? How did you, or the person who approached you, handle this difficult task? Is there anything you would do differently?

2. Hallie was trying to make a healthy choice by not merely hiding her mother's drinking and trying to deal with it alone. Being unfamiliar with alcohol poisoning she made the mistake of not calling an ambulance right away.

Have you ever tried to make good choices that resulted in what seemed like bad outcomes? Has this happened to you? How did you feel?

3. As the old saying goes, "things may get worse before they get better." When we have to make hard but healthy choices because of our own behavior or the behavior of others in our lives this saying may be true. Is there a place in your life where you may be making hard but healthy choices? Are you prepared for the possibility that things may get worse as a result, before they get better? What can you do to prepare and walk through this situation with God?

4. Ellen's drinking has overshadowed every area of her life, including the relationship she should have with her daughter. As a result, Hallie is angry. Mona is surprised that Hallie deals with her mother's hospitalization – and possible death – with angry and sarcastic responses.

People can be angry, sarcastic, or display a variety of emotions when faced with painful situations in their lives. Do you believe this is always the way they feel inside? Is it possible they don't even know how to feel?

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5. When you are dealing with a hard conversation where someone is angry, sarcastic or otherwise emotional are you able to remain calm yourself? Are you able to choose to see beyond the emotion to face the issue? How?

6. Mona's sister Ellen has reached rock bottom, drinking so much she has alcohol poisoning and may not live. To Mona it feels like her niece's drowning all over again. She is afraid it will be too much for the niece who survived her sister's drowning. Mona asks God, "When is enough going to be enough?"

Do you believe God can be merciful and yet allow us to revisit places of great pain? Does it seem that He is almost cruel when we ask for help and healing? Why would He allow these things?

7. Ellen "just couldn't cope", and turned to alcohol to kill the pain of her daughter's death and her husband leaving her. In our culture we are expected to "buck up and stand strong." Is it a realistic expectation? Is it ever OK to be unable to cope?

In what ways can we allow ourselves – or others – to admit we cannot cope? How can we help – or be helped?
