

Morningsong

Chapter Thirteen:

1. Hallie had been close to her Aunt Mona all her life. And since the accident Aunt Mona wasn't acting the same. Hallie didn't know if she should be scared or if things would be just different, and Aunt Mona wasn't saying. "Life handed out a lot of scary things that adults never seemed to want to talk about. Maybe this was just another one."

So often adults believe that if they don't discuss things then children will not know there is anything wrong. But children are very perceptive, and almost always sense when something is wrong. Unfortunately, they often draw the worst conclusions.

How do you believe children should be involved in the difficult things in life? How much do they need to know, and in what detail?

2. Ellen has vowed to write Hallie, but Hallie isn't reading the letters. A condemning voice rings in her head where her mother is concerned, "*She'll never change. She's said it all before, made promises she won't keep, begged for forgiveness and asked to start over. You're only setting yourself up to get hurt again.*"

How could Hallie interact with her mother and protect herself from being completely devastated again if her mother should have a setback?

3. Another voice rings in Hallie's head, "And what made you worth God's forgiveness when He came running after you?"

Read Colossians 3:12-17. How can you honor this word from God when it comes to your relationships with others, and honor Him with healthy boundaries in those relationships at the same time?

4. What do you think the author means when she describes God's voice in Hallie's head as saying, "*This isn't about how many times your mom's failed or you've failed. It's about how much I've forgiven both of you. Once you see that, it's all you'll ever need.*"

Is there a deeper understanding beneath the statement "*Once you see that, it's all you'll ever need.*"? What might that understanding be? How would it change our hearts?

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5. Ellen has voices ringing in her head, too, as she tries to write to Hallie. What could she say? *“Ask her to forgive you, like that will ever happen. Pretend she doesn’t hate you? Say the same things you’ve already said a hundred times? Why even try?”*

Whose voice is ringing in Ellen’s head? What is the intent of the being behind the voice?

6. The truth is Ellen has said those things a hundred times, and failed. But this time she is really doing something to make her succeed in her promises. How should she expect Hallie to respond? How should she respond to Hallie, if she cannot yet believe the promises?

7. Adam realizes that Mona has many thoughts churning in her heart and head. He chooses to lovingly give her a little space to deal with them instead of forcing issues or being clingy. As for him, “The past two days had pressed deeply on his spirit, and a heaviness had settled over him. He knew what he needed most – to sit in silence and pray.”

Adam is wise in discerning both what Mona may need, and what he knows he needs personally. Are you able to step back and examine circumstances in your life to make wise decisions about handling them? Or is your tendency to force issues? Or to cling and be insecure? If you tend toward the latter, how can you change those tendencies?

8. Adam remembers how he hadn’t been back to Gilead Bible Conference to pray since he had first found Mona there. “Too often after that day, his thoughts had traveled to her, her tears, her angry niece, and so he’d prayed. He’d told himself it was what he was meant to do with thoughts about a woman who had captured too much of his attention.”

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-6 and decide what the statement “it was what he was meant to do” means.

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Chapter Fourteen:

1. Sadly, people gossip and pry, and in our story Ginnie Mae is a professional at it. She has taken a keen interest in Mona's life, and the life of her extended family. After a confrontation with Ginnie Mae, Mona is obviously upset. But Elsie tries to bring Mona out of her state of mind with a bit of straight talking wisdom. "You're probably sittin' here stewin', and that would be a sorry waste of your time. People talk – and it's not your job to change them, so you're stuck with lovin' 'em anyway."

Explain what you think Elsie is saying to Mona, using Galatians 5:13-15 as your guide.

2. Ellen continues writing to Hallie, but Hallie responds, "...if the surprise is another letter from my mother, you can keep it. Her sudden interest in communicating with me is a little too late..."

Is it ever too late to communicate? Why or why not?

3. Mona longs for serenity about everything going on in her life, but Elsie gives her a bit more wisdom. "Serenity's just mumbo-jumbo in a world livin' inside-out and upside-down. But peace? We can all have that, and it ain't no secret Who's got the recipe and where He wrote it down."

Read John 14:23-27 to see what God says about peace. How can you apply this to your own life?

4. Just one hour after Elsie shared her wisdom, Mona's mind was in a very different place. Her "hands lay quietly folded on an open Bible as she prayed over the jumbled knots of life."

It has been said that "In one moment you can change your mind. And in that one moment you can change your entire day." Mona's decision to seek the peace of God changed her day in a moment. Do you believe the same could be true of you? Why or why not?

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5. Even when we are successful in changing our minds and relying on the Word of God to find peace the doubts and fears sometimes creep back. Mona discovered this as she lay in an MRI tube, recalling the details of the accident that got her there in the first place. When the doubts and fears came she recalled Scripture to memory: *“You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.” “Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord you God will be with you wherever you go.”*

Is there Scripture that you rely on when doubts and fears trouble you? If so, what is it? If not, look for one and write it below.

6. As Mona nears the end of her MRI she continues to pray, “Father forgive me for forgetting who You are and how much You love me. Help me look into Your eyes and find confidence in Your perfect love and know that it’s more than I’ll ever need, that You’re more than I’ll ever need.... You’re my strength and my portion, Lord. You alone.”

We all forget the power and love of God at certain times in our lives. We must be intentional in deciding how we will respond in those times, and what will help us remember. What would help you remember? Memorizing Scriptures? Keeping a list of times He has helped you so you can read it when you begin to doubt? Write your Scriptures, a list of times He has helped you, and any other ideas you have below.

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Chapter Fifteen:

1. Mona is helping Hallie unpack her things at Harold's home where she and her mother will be staying. Hallie would rather be sleeping, and mouths off to her aunt, "Leave me alone! It's Saturday, and teenagers all over the world are sleeping in. The only reason you dragged me over here is because Adam's coming today and you're avoiding him. Middle-aged women are so transparent. Didn't anybody ever teach you to play the guy game better than this?"

Do you think Hallie is being disrespectful? How should Mona respond? Should she allow Hallie to speak to her this way during this time? Other times?

2. Hallie continues to gripe, "Guilt – it's an adult conspiracy to make kids work. Old people have been using it for generations."

Is there ever a time when guilt is appropriate, whether it be feeling guilt ourselves, or pointing it out to others? Why or why not? How do we decide where to draw the line? Read Hebrews 10:19-23 for more insight on guilt.

3. Thinking that Adam had left her without an explanation, Mona finds the note from him she had not discovered sooner.

Has this ever happened to you? Have you ever left someone behind without an explanation? In either case, how did it make you feel? Why does this sometimes happen?

4. Before she found the note Mona drew some conclusions about Adam's motives, despite what she had learned about him through their experiences together.

Why can it be hard for us to assume the best first?

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5. In his note Adam writes that he recognizes both he and Mona need a break. But he is in no way saying he wants to end their relationship. In fact, he invites her to call him if she needs anything during the week.

Why would Mona jump to the conclusion that he is ending their relationship? Should she go on basing her life on her conclusion? Should she call and ask him to clarify? Why?

6. Mona and Adam do reconnect. And as tough as she tries to be, Mona finds herself wishing Adam would “ask what it had been like during the MRI, if she’d been okay, how she felt about it not that it was over. But it was a stupid thing to want, after all...”

Was it a stupid thing to want? Why would she long for Adam to inquire about her test?

7. Adam realizes Mona had thought the worst of him when he didn’t call, and she hadn’t found the note to understand why. He is hurt. Should he be? Is there anything about Mona he should consider to help him understand her thinking process?

8. Mona apologizes for assuming the worst first. In doing so she knew her honesty meant exposing the child that cowered inside her, the part of her that was afraid to trust him to be a good man.”

What are some of the ways Adam could choose to respond? Read Ephesians4:1-6 and use what you read to formulate a response from Adam below.

9. Mona is on the verge of completing a self-fulfilling prophecy –that she is not good enough or worthy enough for a man - by failing to open up to Adam and pushing him away.

If she chooses to take a risk and open up (while continuing to seek God’s will for her life), how could she find strength, whether he ultimately stays with her or leaves her? Read Proverbs3:1-26 for insight on trusting God to find direction.

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10. Do you have any of Mona's self-protective tendencies? How do you handle them?

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Chapter Sixteen:

1. Growing up, Mona was strong like her mother. Ellen gave in to alcohol like her father. In a letter from rehab she writes Mona, "Hating you for being the strong one was always easy because I never believed there was hope for me."

Can you follow Ellen's line of thinking? Is believing there was no hope for her a belief system she grew up with, or an excuse for her behavior?

2. Ellen goes on in her letter, saying, "I know that rehab has to be a kind of death for me, and I don't have any reason to think I'll make it through."

In what way would rehab be a kind of death for Ellen?

3. Why would Ellen believe she had "no reason to think she would make it through."

If you were her counselor, how would you encourage her? Read Psalm 34 and incorporate it into your answer. Be careful to sound genuine, but not preachy.

4. Ellen's new friend Gloria gives her encouragement while they both go through rehab. "I'm glad someone's sending you letters. Not everyone who struggles the way we do gets support. I know we're responsible for our choices, but it still hurts when people walk away."

Why would some in rehab "not get support" and even have loved ones "walk away?" Is this the way God would want a family member to act? Read Romans 15:1-4 as you consider your answer. Is there ever a time when it is appropriate to walk away?

5. If a person chooses to walk away from a loved one with an addiction, should he or she do so without letting the person know why? Without defining the terms of their relationship as it stands at that point in time? Why or why not?

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6. We learn one of the reasons Harold is willing to help Ellen and Hallie. He has lost his own daughter to alcoholism. The story tells us “They never did work things out in the end.” It broke Harold’s heart.

How do we cope with the grief when we have failed to say words that should have been said before it was too late? What do we do if we never get the chance to work things out in the end?

7. How do we process our grief when we did say the words, and did try to work things out, only to have our efforts “fail?” Read Lamentations 3:22-33 as you consider this question.
